the Bolsheviks & Workers' Control

solidarity

the Bolsheviks & Workers' Control

1917 to 1921

the State and Counter-Revolution

Maurice Brinton

Solidarity . 1970

Published by **Solidarity** (North London)
123 Lathom Road, London, E.6.

Printed by Jeffery, E Bergholt, Suffolk

Introduction

This pamphlet has two aims. It seeks to contribute new factual material to the current discussion on 'workers' control'. And it attempts a new kind of analysis of the fate of the Russian Revolution. The two objectives, as will be shown, are inter-related.

Workers' Control

'Workers' control' is again being talked about. Nationalisation (whether of the Western or Eastern variety) and the rule of the 'Party of the working class' (whether of the Eastern or Western variety) have manifestly failed. They have not satisfied the hopes and expectations of ordinary people—or given them any real say in determining the conditions under which they live. This has created new interest in the subject of 'workers' control' and in ideas which, in a different context, were common currency at the beginning of the century.

Today people as different as Young Liberals and Labour 'lefts', tired trade union officials and 'Trotskyists' of one kind or another—not to mention anarcho-syndicalists and 'libertarian Marxists'—all talk about 'workers' control'. This suggests one of two things. Either these people have common objectives—which seems unlikely—or the words serve to mask as much as they convey. We hope to dispel some of the confusion by recalling how, at a critical stage of history, the advocates of different conceptions of 'workers' control' confronted one another and by showing who won, why they won, and what the consequences were to be.

This return to the historical roots of the controversy is not motivated by an addiction to archivism or by a partiality for the esoteric. The revolutionary movement in Britain—unlike that in several European countries—has never been much concerned with theory, preferring on the whole an empirical, 'suck-it-and-see' kind of approach. This may at times have helped it avoid becoming bogged down in the swamps of metaphysical speculation but the overhead costs—in terms of clarity and consistency, have been heavy. Without a clear understanding of objectives and of the forces (including ideological forces) impeding advance—in short without a sense of history—the revolutionary struggle tends to become 'all movement and no direction'. Without clear perspectives, revolutionaries tend to fall into traps—or be diverted into blind alleys—which, with a little knowledge of their own past, they could easily have avoided.

The confusion about workers' control (at least in Britain) is partly terminological. In the British movement (and to a lesser extent in the English language)

a clear-cut distinction is seldom made between 'control' and 'management', functions which may occasionally overlap but are usually quite distinct. In French, Spanish or Russian political literature two separate terms ('contrôle' and 'gestion', 'control' and 'gerencia', 'kontrolia' and 'upravleniye') refer respectively to partial or total domination of the producers over the productive process. A moment's reflection will make it obvious why one must make this distinction.

Two possible situations come to mind. In one the working class (the collective producer) takes *all* the fundamental decisions. It does so directly, through organisms of its own choice with which it identifies itself completely or which it feels it can totally dominate (Factory Committees, Workers' Councils, etc.). These bodies, composed of elected and revocable delegates probably federate on a regional and national basis. They decide (allowing the maximum possible autonomy for local units) what to produce, how to produce it, at what cost to produce it, at whose cost to produce it. The other possible situation is one in which these fundamental decisions are taken 'elsewhere', 'from the outside', i.e. by the State, by the Party, or by some other organism without deep and direct roots in the productive process itself. The 'separation of the producers from the means of production' (the basis of all class society) is maintained. The oppressive effects of this type of arrangement soon manifest themselves. This happens whatever the revolutionary good intentions of the agency in question, and whatever provisions it may (or may not) make for policy decisions to be submitted from time to time for ratification or amendment.

There are words to describe these two states of affairs. *To manage* is to initiate the decisions oneself, as a sovereign person or collectivity, in full knowledge of all the relevant facts. *To control* is to supervise, inspect or check decisions initiated by others. 'Control' implies a limitation of sovereignty or, at best, a state of duality of power, wherein some people determine the objectives while others see that the appropriate means are used to achieve them. Historically, controversies about workers' control have tended to break out precisely in such conditions of economic dual power.

Like all forms of dual power, economic dual power is essentially unstable. It will evolve into a consolidation of bureaucratic power (with the working class exerting less and less of the control). Or it will evolve into *workers' management*, with the working class taking over all managerial functions. Since 1961, when '*Solidarity*' started advocating 'workers' management of production' others have begun to call for 'workers' *direct* control', 'workers' *full* control', etc.—so many

tacit admissions of the inadequacy (or at least ambiguity) of previous formulations.

It would be a short-sighted view to see in all this a question of linguistic purism, a terminological or doctrinal quibble. We have to pay a ransom to both the past and the present. We have not appeared on the political scene from nowhere. We are part of a revolutionary libertarian tradition for whom these concepts had deep significance. And we are not living in a political vacuum. We are living in a specific historical context, in which a constant struggle is taking place. In this struggle the conflicting interests of different social strata (bourgeoisie, bureaucracy and proletariat) are expressed in different types of demands, more or less clearly formulated. Different ideas about control and management figure prominently in these controversies. Unlike Humpty Dumpty we cannot make words mean exactly what we choose.

The revolutionary movement itself moreover is one of the forces on this social arena. Whether we like it or not—and whether it fully appreciates it or not—most of the revolutionary movement is impregnated with the ethos, traditions and organisational conceptions of Bolshevism. And in the history of the Russian Revolution—particularly between 1917 and 1921—the issue of 'workers' control' versus 'workers' management' loomed large. 'From 1917 to 1921 the issue of industrial administration was the most sensitive indicator of the clash of principles about the shaping of the new social order... It was the most continuous and provocative focus of actual conflict between the communist factions'. (1) And, it should be stressed, between the Bolsheviks and other tendencies in the revolutionary movement. Thousands of revolutionaries were to be killed and hundreds of thousands incarcerated, fighting it out.

Most of those now entering the revolutionary movement will be unfamiliar with these controversies. A virtue should not however be made of this state of affairs. Clarification is essential, but here new problems arise. The methodological poverty, a-historicism (at at times even anti-intellectualism) among so many of those revolutionaries who *do* have some knowledge as to what actually happened is a first tragic obstacle. And it is one of the ironies of the present situation that those others (the residual legatees of Bolshevism) who talk loudest about the 'need for theory' and the 'need to study history' should be those with the most to hide (should their own historical antecedents really be unearthed) and with the most to lose (should a coherent alternative emerge

(1) *R. V. Daniels.* The Conscience of the Revolution, (*Harvard University Press,* 1960), *p.* 81.

to challenge their ossified beliefs).

Some of the confusion about 'workers' control' is neither terminological nor due to ignorance concerning past controversies. It is deliberate. Today, for instance, one finds some hardened, old-time Leninists or Trotskyists (in the Socialist Labour League, International Marxist Group or in the 'leadership' of International Socialism for instance) advocating 'workers' control' without batting an eyelid. Seeking to capitalise on the confusion now rampant in the movement, these people talk of 'workers' control' as if a) they meant by these words what the politically unsophisticated might think they mean (i.e. that working people should themselves decide about the fundamental matters relating to production) and b) as if they—and the Leninist doctrine to which they claim to adhere—had always supported demands of this kind, or as if Leninism had always seen in workers' control the universally valid foundation of a new social order, rather than just a *slogan* to be used for manipulatory purposes in specific and very limited historical contexts. (2)

The question of self-management is not esoteric. Its discussion—in the sharpest possible terms—is not sectarian. Self-management is what the revolution of

---

(2) *Not all Trotskyist tendencies practice this kind of deception. Some are unambiguously reactionary. For instance K. Coates and A. Topham state 'it seems sensible for us to speak of "workers' control" to indicate the aggressive encroachment of Trade Unions* (*sic*!) *on management powers, in a capitalist framework, and of "workers' self-management" to indicate attempts to administer a socialised economy democratically'.* (Industrial Democracy in Great Britain, *Macgibbon and Kee*, 1968, *p.* 363.)
Trotsky himself was just as straightforward. Although not making of workers' control a function to be exercised by the unions he distinguished clearly enough between 'control' and 'management'. 'For us the slogan *of control is tied up with the period of dual power in production which corresponds to the transition from the bourgeois regime to the proletarian. . . In the language of all mankind by control is understood surveillance and checking by one institution over the work of another. Control may be very active, authoritative and all-embracing. But it still remains control. The very idea of this slogan is an outgrowth of the transitional regime in industry, when the capitalist and his administrators can no longer take a step without the consent of the workers, but on the other hand, when the workers have not as yet . . . acquired the technique of management, nor yet created the organs essential for this'. (L. Trotsky.* What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat, 1932).

our time is all about. This in itself would justify a pamphlet such as the present one. A study of this period (Russia, 1917–1921) has, however, deeper implications. It could provide the basis for a new kind of analysis of the fate of the Russian Revolution, a task to which we will now briefly turn.

The Russian Revolution

To propose a new way of looking at what happened in Russia in 1917 (and after) is synonymous with an invitation to be misunderstood. If moreover the questions asked and the methodology suggested happen to differ from those in current use the proposal almost becomes a guarantee. As we have had occasion to mention before, misrepresentation is a way of life on the traditional left, for whom nothing is quite as painful as a new idea.

Over the last 50 years all the existing organisations of the left have elaborated a whole mythology (and even a whole anti-mythology) about the Russian Revolution. The parliamentary fetishists of Social-Democracy see 'the failure of Bolshevism' in its 'antidemocratic practices'. The original sin, for them, was the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. The self-styled 'communist' movement (Stalinists, Trotskyists, Maoists, etc.) talks with filial pride of the 'glorious, socialist, October Revolution'. They seek to vaunt and popularise its original achievements while differing in their appreciations of what happened subsequently, when it happened, why it happened and to whom it happened. For various anarchists the fact that the State or 'political power' were not immediately 'abolished' is the ultimate proof and yardstick that nothing of fundamental significance really occurred. (3) The SPGB draw much the same conclusion, although they attribute it to the fact that the wages system was not abolished, the majority of the Russian population not having had the benefit of hearing the SPGB viewpoint (as put by spokesmen duly sanctioned by their Executive Committee) and not having then sought to win a Parliamentary majority in the existing Russian institutions.

On all sides people seek to use the Russian Revolution with a view to integrating it into their own propaganda —only retaining of it those aspects which happen to

---

(3) *An example of such an over-simplified analysis of the fate of the Revolution can be found in Voline* Nineteen Seventeen (*Freedom Press*, 1954). *'The Bolshevik Party, once in control, installed itself as absolute master. It was quickly corrupted. It organised itself as a privileged caste. And later it flattened and subjected the working class in order to exploit it, under new forms, in its own interests'.*

conform with their own particular analysis of history, or their own particular prescriptions for the present. Whatever was new, whatever seemed to contradict established theories or break out of established categories, has been systematically 'forgotten', minimised, distorted, denied.

Any attempt to re evaluate the crucial experience of 1917–1921 is bound to evoke opposition. The first to react will be the 'apparatchiks' who for years have been protecting 'revolutionary' organisations (and 'revolutionary' ideology) from the dual threats of subversion and renewal. Opposition will also be found however in the minds of many honest militants, seeking the road to genuinely revolutionary politics. One isn't dealing here with a simple psychological resistance but with a much deeper phenomenon which cannot be explained away by reference to the reactionary role and influence of various 'leaderships'. If the average militant has difficulty in understanding the full significance of some of the problems raised in the early stages of the Russian Revolution it is because these problems *are* amongst the most important and difficult (if not *the* most important and difficult) ever to have confronted the working class. The working class made a revolution that went beyond a mere change in the political personnel at the top. It was able to expropriate the former owners of the means of production (thereby profoundly altering the existing property relations). But to what extent was it able to go beyond even this? To what extent was it able—or prepared—to revolutionise the relations of production? Was it willing to destroy the authority structure which the relations of production embody and perpetuate in all class societies? To what extent was it prepared itself to manage production (and thereby the whole of society), or to what extent was it inclined to delegate this task to others? And to what extent was the dominant ideology to triumph, compelling the working class to substitute for its avowed enemies a Party that claimed to speak 'on its behalf'?

To answer these questions is a major task, beset with pitfalls. One of the dangers confronting anyone seeking dispassionately to analyse the 'heroic period of the Russian Revolution' is the danger of 'retrospective identification' with this or that tendency or individual then active on the political scene (Osinsky, Kollontai, Maximov, Makhno or Miasnikov, for instance). This is a pointless political pastime. It leads rapidly to a state of mind where instead of seeking to understand the broad course of events (which *is* a relevant preoccupation) revolutionaries find themselves asking such questions as 'what should have been done at this or that moment?'; 'was this or that action premature?'; 'who was right at this or that Congress?'; etc. We hope to have avoided this snare. When, for instance, we study

the struggle of the Workers' Opposition against the leadership of the Party (in 1920 and 1921) it is not for us a question of 'taking sides'. It is a question of *understanding* what the forces in conflict really represented. What, for instance, were the motives (and the ideological and other limitations) of those who appeared to be challenging the drift to bureaucratisation in every aspect of social life?

Another danger (or another form of the same danger) threatens those venturing into this field for the first time, while still befuddled by the official mythology. It is the danger of becoming entangled in the very legend one is seeking to destroy. Those, for instance, seeking to 'demolish' Stalin (or Trotsky, or Lenin) may successfully achieve their immediate objective. But they may 'succeed' at the expense of not seeing, sensing or recording the most fundamental new features of this period: the autonomous action of the working class seeking totally to alter the conditions of its existence. We hope to have avoided this trap. If we have quoted at some length the statements of prominent individuals it is only insofar as they epitomize the ideologies which, at a given point in history, guided the actions and thoughts of men. Throughout the account, moreover, we have felt that the only way seriously to deal with what the Bolsheviks said or did was to explain the social role of their utterances and actions.

We must now state our own methodological premisses. We hold that the 'relations of production'—the relations which individuals or groups enter into with one another in the process of producing wealth—are the essential foundations of any society. A certain pattern of relations of production is the common denominator of all class societies. This pattern is one in which the producer does not dominate the means of production but on the contrary both is 'separated from them' and from the products of his own labour. In all class societies the producer is in a position of subordination to those who manage the productive process. Workers' management of production—implying as it does the total domination of the producer over the productive process—is not for us a marginal matter. It is the core of our politics. It is the only means whereby authoritarian (order-giving, order-taking) relations in production can be transcended and a free, communist or anarchist, society introduced.

We also hold that the means of production may change hands (passing for instance from private hands into those of a bureaucracy, collectively owning them) *without this revolutionising the relations of production.* Under such circumstances—and whatever the formal status of property—the society is still a class society, for production is still managed by an agency other than

the producers themselves. Property relations, in other words, do not necessarily reflect the relations of production. They may serve to mask them—and in fact they often have. (4)

This much of the analysis is fairly widely accepted. What has not been hitherto attempted is to relate the history of the Russian Revolution to this overall conceptual framework. Here we can only indicate the broad lines of such an approach. (5) Seen in this light the Russian Revolution represents an unsuccessful attempt by the Russian working class to break out of relations of production that were proving increasingly oppressive. The massive upsurge of 1917 proved strong enough to smash the political supremacy of the bourgeoisie (by shattering the economic base on which it was founded: the private ownership of the means of production). It altered the existing system of property relations. But it did not prove strong enough (despite heroic attempts in this direction) to alter the authoritarian relations of production characteristic of all class societies. Sections of the working class (those most active in the Factory Committee movement) certainly attempted to influence the Revolution in this direction. But their attempt failed. It is worth analysing the causes of this failure—and seeing how new masters came to replace the old ones.

What were the forces pitted against those seeking a total transformation of the conditions of industrial life? First, of course, there was the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie had *everything* to lose in such a total social upheaval. Confronted with workers' management, it stood to lose not only its *ownership* of the means of production but also the possibility of *privileged positions* vested in expertise

---

(4) *For a full discussion of this concept—and of all its implications—see 'Les rapports de production en Russie' by P. Chaulieu, in issue No.* 2 (*May-June* 1949) *of* Socialisme ou Barbarie. *Although the concept may surprise many 'marxists' it is of interest that Engels had clearly perceived it. In his letter to Schmidt* (*October* 27, 1890) *he wrote*: *'In a modern state law must not only correspond to the general economic condition and be its expression, but must also be an internally coherent expression which does not, owing to its inner contradictions, reduce itself to nought. And in order to achieve this, the faithful reflection of economic conditions suffers increasingly. . . The reflection of economic relations as legal principles is necessarily a topsy-turvy one'.* (*Marx-Engels*—Selected Correspondence, *pp.* 504-5)

(5) *That such an analysis might be possible was suggested in an excellent short pamphlet* Notes pour une analyse de la Révolution Russe (*n.d.*) *by J. Barrot. (Obtainable from Librairie 'La Vieille Taupe',* 1 *rue des Fossés-St.-Jacques, Paris* 5).

and in the exercise of decisional authority. No wonder the bourgeois breathed a sigh of relief when they saw that the leaders of the Revolution would 'go no further than nationalisation' and were keen to leave intact the order-giver/order-taker relationship in industry and elsewhere. True, large sections of the bourgeoisie fought desperately to regain their lost property. The Civil War was a protracted and bloody affair. But thousands of those who, through custom and culture, were more or less closely attached to the expropriated bourgeoisie were very soon offered the opportunity to re-enter the 'revolutionary stronghold'—by the back door as it were—and to resume their role as managers of the labour process in the 'Workers' State'. They seized this unexpected opportunity eagerly. In droves they either joined the Party—or decided to co-operate with it, cynically welcoming every utterance by Lenin or Trotsky in favour of 'labour discipline' or 'one-man management'. Many were soon to be appointed (from above) to leading positions in the economy. Merging with the new political-administrative 'elite', of which the Party itself formed the nucleus, the more 'enlightened' and technologically skilled sections of the 'expropriated class' soon resumed dominant positions in the relations of production.

Secondly, the Factory Committee Movement had to cope with openly hostile tendencies on the 'left', such as the Mensheviks. The Mensheviks repeatedly stressed that as the revolution could only be of bourgeois-democratic type there could be no future in attempts by the workers to manage production. All such endeavours were denounced as 'anarchist' and 'utopian'. In places the Mensheviks proved a serious obstacle to the Factory Committee Movement, but the opposition was anticipated, principled and consistent.

Thirdly—and far more difficult to see through—was the attitude of the Bolsheviks. Between March and October the Bolsheviks supported the growth of the Factory Committees, only to turn viciously against them in the last few weeks of 1917, seeking to incorporate them into the new union structure, the better to emasculate them. This process, which is fully described in the pamphlet, was to play an important role in preventing the rapidly growing challenge to capitalist relations of production from coming to a head. Instead the Bolsheviks canalised the energies released between March and October into a successful onslaught against the political power of the bourgeoisie (and against the property relations on which that power was based). At this level the revolution was 'successful'. But the Bolsheviks were also 'successful' in restoring 'law and order' in industry—a law and order that reconsolidated the authoritarian relations in production, which for a brief period had been seriously

shaken.

Why did the Party act in this manner? To answer this question would require a much fuller analysis of the Bolshevik Party and of its relation to the Russian working class than we can here attempt. Again one would have to steer clear both of mythology ('the great Bolshevik Party', 'the weapon forged by Lenin', 'the spearhead of the revolution', etc.) and of anti-mythology ('the Party as the embodiment of totalitarianism, militarism, bureaucracy,' etc.), seeking constantly to understand rather than to rant or rave. At the superficial level both the Party's ideology and its practice were firmly rooted in the specific historical circumstances of Tsarist Russia, in the first decade of this century. Illegality and persecution partly explain (although they do not justify) the Party's organisational structure and its conception of its relationship to the class. (6) What is more difficult to understand is the naivety of the Bolshevik leaders who don't seem to have appreciated the effects that this type of organisation and this type of relationship to the class would inevitably have on the subsequent history of the Party.

Writing of the early history of the Party no lesser an exponent of Bolshevik orthodoxy than Trotsky was to state: 'The habits peculiar . . . to a political machine were already forming in the underground. The young revolutionary bureaucrat was already emerging as a type. The conditions of conspiracy, true enough, offered rather meager scope for such formalities of democracy as elections, accountability and control. Yet undoubtedly the Committee men narrowed these limitations considerably more than necessity demanded. They were far more intransigent and severe with the revolutionary working men that with themselves, preferring to domineer, even on occasions that called imperatively for lending an attentive ear to the voice of the masses. Krupskaya notes that, just as in the Bolshevik committees, so at the Congress itself, there were almost no working men. The intellectuals predominated. "The Committee man" writes Krupskaya, "was usually quite a self-confident person . . . as a rule he did not recognise any internal party democracy . . . did not want any innovations . . . did not desire and did not know how to adapt himself to rapidly changing conditions". (7)

---

(6) *Both explicity outlined in the* theory (*c.f. Lenin*: *'What is to be done' and 'One step forwards, two steps back'*) *and in the* practice *of Bolshevism, between* 1901 *and* 1917.

(7) *L. Trotsky.* Stalin (*London*, 1947), *p.* 61. *The Congress referred to is the* 3*rd Party Congress* (*April* 25—*May* 10, 1905).

What all this was to lead to was first hinted at in 1905. Soviets had appeared in many places. 'The Petersburgh Committee of the Bolsheviks was frightened at first by such an innovation as a non-partisan representation of the embattled masses. It could find nothing better to do than to present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social-Democratic programme or disband. The Petersburgh Soviet as a whole, including the contingent of Bolshevik working men as well, ignored this ultimatum without batting an eyelid'. (8) Broué, one of the more sophisticated apologists of Bolshevism, was to write that 'those in the Bolshevik Party who were the most favourable to the Soviets only saw in them, in the best of cases, auxiliaries for the Party . . . only belatedly did the Party discover the role it could play in the Soviets, and the interest that the Soviets presented for increasing the Party's influence with a view to leading the masses'. (9) The problem is put here in a nutshell. The Bolshevik cadres saw their role as the leadership of the revolution. Any movement not initiated by them or independent of their control could only evoke their suspicion. (10) It has often been said that the Bolsheviks were 'surprised' by the creation of the Soviets: this euphemism should not mislead us. The reaction of the Bolsheviks was of far deeper significance than mere 'suprise'—it reflected a whole concept of revolutionary struggle, a whole concept of the relationship between workers and revolutionaries. The *action* of the Russian masses themselves, as far back as 1905, was already to condemn these attitudes as outdated.

This separation between the Bolsheviks and the masses was to be revealed repeatedly during 1917. It was first witnessed during the February revolution, again at the time of the 'April Theses', and later still at the time of the July days. (11) It has repeatedly been admitted that the Party made 'mistakes' both in 1905 and in 1917. But this 'explanation' explains nothing. What one should be asking is what made these mistakes possible? And one can answer only if one understands the *type of work* undertaken by the Party cadres, from the creation of the

---

(8) *L. Trotsky. ibid., pp.* 64-65.

(9) *P. Broué.* Histoire du Parti Bolshevik. (*Editions de Minuit, Paris* 1963), *p.* 35.

(10) *The same attitude was to be found* within *the Party itself. As Trotsky himself was to say, this time approvingly: 'The statutes should express the leadership's organised distrust of the members, a distrust manifesting itself in vigilant control from above over the Party'. I. Deutscher,* The Prophet Armed, *O.U.P.* 1954), *p.* 76.

(11) *No, we are not saying that the military overthrow of the Provisional Government was possible in July. We are merely stressing how out of touch the Party was with what the masses really wanted.*

Party right up to the time of the Revolution. The Party leaders (from those on the Central Committee down to those in charge of local groups) had been placed, through the combined effects of the conditions of the struggle against Tsarism and of their own organisational conceptions, in a situation which allowed them only tenuous links with the real workers' movement. 'A worker-agitator' wrote Lenin, 'who shows any talent and is at all promising *should not work in the factory.* We must see to it that he lives on Party support . . . and goes over to an underground status'. (12) No wonder the few Bolshevik cadres of working class origin soon lost real contacts with the class.

The Bolshevik Party was torn by a contradiction which helps explain its attitude before and after 1917. Its strength lay in the advanced workers who supported it. There is no doubt that this support was at times widespread and genuine. But these workers could not control the Party. The leadership was firmly in the hands of professional revolutionaries. In a sense this was inevitable. A clandestine press and the dissemination of propaganda could only be kept going regularly by militants constantly on the move and at times compelled to seek refuge overseas. A worker could only become a Bolshevik cadre on condition he ceased work and placed himself at the disposal of the Party, which would then send him on special missions, to this or that town. The apparatus of the Party was in the hands of revolutionary specialists. The contradiction was that the real living forces that provided the strength of the Party could not control it. As an institution, the Party totally eluded control by the Russian working class. The problems encountered by the Russian Revolution after 1917 did not bring about this contradiction, they only served to exacerbate it. The attitude of the Party in 1917 and after are products of its history. This is what rendered so futile most of the attempts made within the Party by various oppositions between 1918 and 1921. They failed to perceive that a given ideological premise (the preordained hegemony of the Party) led necessarily to certain conclusions in practice.

But even this is probably not taking the analysis far enough. At an even deeper level the very conception of this kind of organisation and this kind of relationship to the mass movement reflect the unrecognised influence of bourgeois ideology, even on the minds of those who were relentlessly seeking to overthrow bourgeois society. The concept that society must necessarily be divided into 'leaders' and 'led', the notion that there are some born to rule while others cannot really develop beyond a certain stage have from time immemorial been

(12) *Lenin.* Sochineniya, *IV*, 441.

the tacit assumptions of every ruling class in history. For even the Bolsheviks to accept them shows how correct Marx was when he proclaimed that 'the ruling ideas of each epoch are the ideas of its ruling class'. Confronted with an 'efficient', tightly-knit organisation of this kind, built on ideas of this kind, it is scarcely surprising that the emerging Factory Committees were unable to carry the Revolution to completion.

The final difficulty confronting the Committees was inherent in the Committee movement itself. Although certain individuals showed extraordinary lucidity, and although the Committee Movement represents the highest manifestation of the class struggle achieved in 1917, the movement as a whole was unable to understand what was happening to it and to offer any serious resistance. It did not succeed in generalising its experience and the record it left is, unfortunately, very fragmentary. Unable to proclaim its own objectives (workers' self-management) in clear and positive terms, it was inevitable that others would step into the vacuum. With the bourgeoisie in full disintegration, and the working class as yet insufficiently strong or conscious to impose *its own* solutions to the problems tearing society apart, the triumphs of Bolshevism and of the bureaucracy were both inevitable.

An analysis of the Russian Revolution shows that in allowing a specific group, separate from the workers themselves, to take over the function of managing production, the working class loses all possibility of even controlling the means of producing wealth. The separation of productive labour from the means of production results in an exploiting society. Moreover, when institutions such as the soviets could no longer be influenced by ordinary workers, the regime could no longer be called a soviet regime. By no stretch of the imagination could it still be taken to reflect the interests of the working class. *The basic question: who manages production after the overthrow of the bourgeoisie? should therefore now become the centre of any serious discussion about socialism.* Today the old equation (liquidation of the bourgeoisie=workers' state) popularised by countless Leninists, Stalinists and Trotskyists is just not good enough.

In 1917 the Russian workers created organs (Factory Committees and Soviets) that might have ensured the management of society by the workers themselves. But the soviets passed into the hands of Bolshevik functionaries. A state apparatus, separate from the masses, was rapidly reconstituted. The Russian workers did not succeed in creating new institutions through which they would have managed both industry and social life. This task was therefore taken over by someone else, by a

group whose specific task it became. The bureaucracy organised the work process in a country of whose political institutions it was also master.

All this necessitates a serious re-evaluation of several basic concepts. 'Workers' power' cannot be identified or equated with the power of the Party—as it repeatedly was by the Bolsheviks. In the words of Rosa Luxemburg, workers' power must be implemented 'by the class, not by a minority, managing things in the name of the class. It must emanate from the active involvement of the masses, remain under their direct influence, be submitted to control by the entire population, result from the increasing political awareness of the people'. As for the concept of 'taking power' it cannot mean a semi-military putsch, carried out by a minority, as it obviously does for so many who still seem to be living in the Petrograd of 1917. Nor can it only mean the defence—however necessary—of what the working class has won against attempts by the bourgeoisie to win it back. What 'taking power' really implies is that the vast majority of the working class at last realises its ability to manage both production and society—and organises to this end.

This text is in no sense an economic history of Russia between 1917 and 1921. It is, at best, a selective industrial chronology. In most instances the facts speak for themselves. In a few places, we have taken the opportunity of describing our own views, particularly when we felt that all the protagonists in the great historical debates were wrong, or trapped in a system of ideas that prevented them from appreciating the real significance of what was happening. Events such as the stages of the Civil War are only mentioned in order to place various controversies in context—and to nail once and for all the allegation that many of the measures described were taken 'as a result of the Civil War'.

It will probably be objected that, throughout the narrative, greater stress has been placed on various struggles within the Party than on the actions of the millions who, for one reason or another, never joined the Party or who, from the beginning, saw through what it was endeavouring to do. The 'charge' is true but the shortcoming almost unavoidable. The aspirations of thousands of people, their doubts, their hesitations, their hopes, their sacrifices, their desire to transform the conditions of their daily life and their struggles to do so are undoubtedly as much a moulding force of history as the resolutions of Party Congresses or the speeches of Party leaders. Yet an activity that has neither rules nor statutes, neither tribunes nor troubadours, belongs almost by definition to what history suppresses. An awareness of the problem, however acute, will not generate the missing material. And an essay such as this

is largely a question of documentation. The masses make history, they do not write it. And those who do write it are nearly always more concerned with ancestor worship and retrospective justification that with a balanced presentation of the facts.

Other charges will also be made. The quotations from Lenin and Trotsky will not be denied but it will be stated that they are 'selective' and that 'other things, too' were said. Again, we plead 'guilty'. But we would stress that there are hagiographers enough in the trade whose 'objectivity' (like Deutscher's for instance) is but a cloak for sophisticated apologetics. There is moreover another reason for unearthing this material. Fifty years after the Revolution—and long after its 'isolation' has been broken—the bureaucratic system in Russia clearly bears little resemblance to the model of the Paris Commune (elected and revocable delegates, none receiving more than a workingman's wage, etc., etc.). In fact Russia's social structure has scarcely any anticipation in the whole corpus of marxist theory. It therefore seems more relevant to quote those statements of the Bolshevik leaders of 1917 which helped determine Russia's evolution rather than those other statements which, like the May Day speeches of Labour leaders, were for ever to remain in the realm of rhetoric.

Notes on Dates

On February 14, 1918, Russia abandoned the old Julian calendar and adopted the Gregorian one in use in Western Europe. February 1 became February 14. Old style dates have been observed up to this point. New style dates thereafter.

1917

February
Strikes and bread riots in Petrograd. Angry street demonstrations against the Government. Troops, sent to restore order, fraternize with demonstrators. Soviets reappear in several cities, for the first time since 1905.

February 27
Abdication of Nicholas II. Formation of Provisional Government (Prince Lvov as Prime Minister).

March
Factory and Shop Committees (1), Workers' Councils and Councils of Elders appear in every major industrial centre of European Russia. From the onset, their demands are not limited to wages or hours but challenge many managerial prerogatives.

In several instances Factory Committees were set up because the previous owners or managers had disappeared during the February turmoil. Most of those who later drifted back were allowed to resume their positions —but had to accept the Factory Committees. 'The proletariat' wrote Pankratova* 'without legislative sanction, started simultaneously to create all its organisations: soviets of workers' deputies, trade unions and Factory Committees'. (2) A tremendous working class pressure was developing all over Russia.

March 10
First formal capitulation by a significant body of employers. Agreement signed between Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet and Petrograd Manufacturers' Association, granting the 8-hr day in some enterprises and 'recognising' some of the Committees. Most other employers refused to follow suit. For instance

(1) Fabzavkomy: short for fabrichno-zavodnye komitety.

(2) A. M. Pankratova. *Fabzavkomy Rossii v borbe za sotsialisticheskuyu fabriku* (Russian Factory Committees in the struggle for the socialist factory). Moscow, 1923, p. 9. Parts of this important document were published in the December 1967 (No. 34) issue of the French journal *Autogestion* (page numbers refer to the *French* version).

---

* *Anna Mikhailovna Pankratova joined the Bolshevik Party in* 1919 *as an Odessa University student. She wrote a number of books on the history of the Russian labour movement and later became a professor at Moscow University and at the Academy of Social Sciences. In* 1952 *she was elected to the Central Committee of the Party and the following year became editor-in-chief of the Party journal* Voprosii Istorii (*Questions of History*). *She died in* 1957.

Published before the era of systematic historical distortion, her pamphlet on the Factory Committees contains interesting material. Her scope and vision are however seriously limited because of her endorsement of two fundamental Bolshevik assumptions: (*a*) *'that the role of the Factory Committees ends either with the ebb of the revolutionary tide or with the victory of the Revolution' and* (*b*) *that the 'demands and aspirations arising from the depths of the working class are given formulation, and provided with ideological content and organisational cement through the Party. . . The struggle for workers' control took place under the leadership of the Party, which had allowed* (*sic*!) *the proletariat to take political and economic power'.*

on March 14 the Committee for Commerce and Industry declared that 'the question of the 8-hr day cannot be resolved by reciprocal agreement between workers and employers, because it is a matter of state importance'. The first major fight of the Factory Committees took place on this issue.

The 8-hr day was soon imposed in Petrograd, either with the reluctant consent of the employers or unilaterally, by the workers. The 'recognition' of the Factory Committees proved much more difficult to impose, both employers and State recognizing the threat to them inherent in this form of organisation.

April 2

Exploratory Conference of Factory Committees of Petrograd War Industries, convened on the initiative of the workers of the Artillery Department. This Conference was to proclaim what were, at that time, the most advanced 'terms of reference' for any Factory Committee. Paragraphs 5 to 7 of the proclamation stipulated:

'From the Factory Committee should emanate all instructions concerning internal factory organisation (i.e. instructions concerning such matters as hours of work, wages, hiring and firing, holidays, etc.). The factory manager to be kept notified. . .

'The whole administrative personnel (management at all levels and technicians) is taken on with the consent of the Factory Committee which has to notify the workers of its decisions at mass meetings of the whole factory or through shop committees . . .

'The Factory Committee controls managerial activity in the administrative, economic and technical fields . . . representatives of the Factory Committee must be provided, for information, with all official documents of the management, production budgets and details of all items entering or leaving the factory . . . '(3)

(3) ibid., pp. 12—13.

April 7

Publication of *April Theses,* shortly after Lenin had returned to Petrograd from abroad. Only reference to workers' control is in Thesis 8: 'Our immediate task shall not be the "introduction of socialism" but to bring social production and distribution of products . . . under the control of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies.'

April 23

The new government had to make some verbal concessions. It passed a law partially 'recognising' the Committees but carefully restricting their influence. All the key issues were left to the 'mutual agreement of the parties concerned'—in other words there was no *statutory* obligation on the employers to deal directly with the Committees.

The workers however showed little concern about the provisions of the law. 'They commented, in their own fashion, on the law of April 23 . . . They determined their own terms of reference, in each factory, steadily

expanding their prerogatives and decided on what their representatives might do, according to the relation of forces in each particular instance.' (4)

(4) ibid., p. 12.

April 23

Lenin writes: 'Such measures as the nationalisation of the land and of the banks and syndicates of capitalists, or at least the immediate establishment of the *control* of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies over them (measures which do not in any way imply the "introduction of socialism") must be absolutely insisted on and whenever possible introduced by revolutionary means'. Such measures were 'entirely feasible economically' and without them it would be 'impossible to heal the wounds of the war and prevent the impending collapse'. (5)

(5) V. I. Lenin. *Tasks of the Proletariat in our Revolution. Selected Works*, vol. VI, p. 62.

To Lenin's basic ideas of workers' control as a 'curb on the capitalists' and 'a means of preventing collapse', a third was soon to be added with recurs in much of Lenin's writing of this period. It is the concept of workers' control as a 'prelude to nationalisation'. For instance: 'We must at once prepare the Soviets of Workers' Deputies, the Soviet of Deputies of Bank Employees, etc., to proceed to the adoption of feasible and practicable measures for the merging of all the banks into one single national bank, to be followed by the establishment of the control of the Soviets of Workers' Deputies over the banks and syndicates and then by their nationalisation'. (6)

(6) V. I. Lenin. *Political Parties and Tasks of the Proletariat.* ibid., p. 85—6.

May 1917

More and more employers were 'having to cope' with Factory Committees. The bourgeois press launched a massive campaign against the 8-hr day and the Committees, trying to smear the workers in the eyes of the soldiers as lazy, greedy, good-for-nothings, leading the country to ruin through their 'excessive' demands. The workers' press patiently explains the real causes of industrial stagnation and the real conditions of working class life. At the invitation of various Factory Committees, Army delegates were sent to 'verify' conditions at the rear. Then they publicly testified as to the truth of what the workers were saying . . .

May 17

In *Pravda* Lenin explicitly endorses the slogan of workers' control, declaring that 'the workers must demand the *immediate* realisation of control, *in fact* and without fail, by the workers themselves'. (7)

(7) V. I. Lenin. *Materials on Revision of Party Programme.* ibid., pp. 116—117.

May 20

Lenin produces draft for a new Party programme: 'The Party fights for a more democratic workers' and peasants' republic, in which the police and standing army will be completely abolished and replaced by the universally armed people, by a universal militia. All official persons will not only be elected but also subject to recall at any time upon the demand of a majority of the electors. All official persons, without exception, will be paid at a rate not exceeding the average wage of a

competent worker'.

At the same time Lenin calls for the 'unconditional *participation* (my emphasis) of the workers in the control of the affairs of the trusts'—which could be brought about 'by a decree requiring but a single day to draft'. (8) The concept that 'workers participation' should be introduced by legislative means (i.e. from above) clearly has a illustrious ancestry.

(8) V. I. Lenin. *Ruin is Threatening*. ibid., p. 142.

May 29

Kharkov Conference of Factory Committees.

In certain respects the provinces were in advance of Petrograd and Moscow. The Kharkov Conference demanded that the Factory Committees become 'organs of the Revolution . . . aiming at consolidating its victories'. 'The Factory Committees must take over production, protect it, develop it'. 'They must fix wages, look after hygiene, control the technical quality of products, decree all internal factory regulations and determine solutions to all conflicts.' (9) Some non-Bolshevik delegates even proposed that the Committees should take over the factories directly and exercise *all* managerial functions.

(9) I. Kreizel. *Iz istorii profdvizheniya g. Kharkova v* 1917 *godu* (On the history of the Trade Union Movement in Kharkov in 1917). Referred to by Pankratova (op. cit., p. 15). Kharkov, 1921.

May 30–June 5

First full Conference of Petrograd Factory Committees.

The Conference met in the Tauride Palace, in the same hall where three months earlier the State Duma (Parliament) had assembled. At least half the Committees represented were from the engineering industry. 'The long and flowery speeches of the bourgeois parliamentarians had given way to the sincere, simple and usually concise contributions of "deputies" who had just left their tools or their machines, to express for the first time in public their humiliations, their class needs and their needs as human beings'. (10)

(10) A. Pankratova, op. cit., p. 19.

Bolshevik delegates were in a majority. Although most of their contributions centred on the need to introduce workers' control as a means of 'restoring order' and 'maintaining production', other viewpoints were also voiced. Nemtsov, a Bolshevik metal worker, proclaimed that the 'working of the factories is now in the exclusive hands of higher management. We must introduce the principle of election. To assess work . . . we don't need the individual decisions of foremen. By introducing the elective principle we can control production'. Naumov, another delegate, claimed that 'by taking into our own hands the control of production we will learn about its practical aspects and raise it to the level of future socialist production'. (11) We are a long way here from the later Bolshevik advocacy of the 'efficiency' of one-man mangement and from their later practice of appointments from above.

(11) ibid., p. 19.

The Conference was widely attended. Even M.I. Skobelev, Menshevik Minister of Labour in the Provisional Government was to address it. His contribution was of interest as a sort of anticipation of what the

Bolsheviks would be saying before the year was up. Skobelev asserted that 'the regulation and control of industry was a task for the State. Upon the individual class, especially the working class, lies the responsibility for helping the state in its organisational work'. He also stated that 'the transfer of enterprises into the hands of the people at the present time would not assist the Revolution'. The regulation of industry was the function of Government, not of autonomous Factory Committees. 'The Committees would best serve the workers' cause by becoming subordinate units in a state-wide network of trade unions'. (12)

A similar viewpoint was put by Rozanov, one of the founders of the Professional Workers' Union. His assertions that the 'functions of the Factory Committees were ephemeral' and that 'Factory Committees should constitute the basic elements of the unions' were sharply criticized. Yet this is exactly the role to which—within a few months—the Factory Committees were to be relegated by Bolshevik practice. At this stage, however, the Bolsheviks were critical of the idea (the unions were still largely under Menshevik influence).

Lenin's address to the Conference contained a hint of things to come. He explained that workers' control meant 'that the majority of workers should enter all responsible institutions and that the administration should render an account of its actions to the most authoritative workers' organisations'. (13) Under 'workers' control' Lenin clearly envisaged an 'administration' other than the workers themselves.

The final resolution, supported by 336 of the 421 delegates, proclaimed the Factory Committees 'fighting organisations, elected on the basis of the widest democracy and with a collective leadership'. Their objectives were the 'creation of new conditions of work'. The resolution called for 'the organisation of thorough control by labour over production and distribution' and for 'a proletarian majority in all institutions having executive power'. (14)

The next few weeks witnessed a considerable growth of the Factory Committees. Wherever they were strong enough (both before but especially after the October Revolution, when they were abetted by local Soviets) the Committees 'boldly ousted the management and assumed direct control of their respective plants'. (15)

June 16

First All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

June 20–28

A trade union Conference held in Petrograd passed a resolution which stipulated that 'the trade unions, defending the rights and interests of hired labour . . . cannot take upon themselves administrative-economic functions in production'. (16) The Factory Committees were relegated to the role of seeing to it 'that laws for the defence of labour were observed and that collective

(12) *Pervaya rabochaya konferentsiya fabrichno-zavodskikh komitetov*, (First Workers' Conference of Factory Committees) Petrograd, 1917.

(13) V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniya*, XX, 459.

(14) S. O. Zagorsky, *State Control of Industry in Russia during the War*. (New Haven, 1928), pp. 174—5.

(15) R. V. Daniels. *The Conscience of the Revolution*. (Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 83.

(16) Tretya vserossiiskaya konferentsiya professionalnykh soyuzov: Rezolyutsii prinyatiya na zasedaniakh konferentsii 20—28 Iyunya/3—11 Iyulya 1917 g. (Third All Russian Conference of Trade Unions: Resolutions adopted at the sessions of the Conference of June 20—28/July 3—11, 1917). Petrograd, n.d., p. 18.

agreements concluded by the unions were also observed'. The Factory Committees were to agitate for the entrance of all workers of the enterprise into the union. They should 'work to strengthen and extend the trade unions, contribute to the unity of their fighting action' and 'increase the authority of the unions in the eyes of unorganised workers'. (17)

(17) ibid., para 6.

This Conference, dominated by Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries, had considerable misgivings concerning the Factory Committees. It expressed these by advocating that the Committees should be elected *on the basis of lists drawn up by the trade unions.*

The Bolshevik theses, presented to the Conference by Glebov-Avilov, suggested that for the conduct of workers' control' 'economic control commissions' should be attached to the central administration of the unions. These Commissions were to be made up of members of the Factory Committee and were to co-operate with the latter in each individual enterprise. The Factory Committees were not only to perform 'control functions' for the trade unions but were also to be financially dependent upon the union. (18)

(18) ibid., p. 323.

The Conference set up an All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, to which representatives were elected *in proportion to the numerical strength of the various political tendencies present* at the Conference.

At this stage the Bolsheviks were riding two horses, seeking to gain the ascendancy in both the unions and the Committees. They were not averse to a considerable amount of double talk in the pursuit of this double objective. In unions under strong Menshevik control the Bolsheviks would press for considerable autonomy for the Factory Committees. In unions under their own control, they would be far less enthusiastic about the matter.

It is necessary at this stage to say a few words about the role of the unions before and immediately after the February Revolution.

Before 1917 the unions had been relatively unimportant in Russian labour history. Russian industry was still very young. Under Tsardom (at least until the turn of the century) trade union organisation had been illegal and persecuted. 'In suppressing trade unionism Tsardom unwittingly put a premium upon revolutionary political organisation . . . Only the most politically-minded workers, those prepared to pay for their conviction with prison and exile, could be willing to join trade unions in these circumstances . . . whereas in Britain the Labour Party was created by the trade unions, the Russian trade unions from their beginning led their existence in the shadow of the political movement'. (19)

(19) I. Deutscher, *Soviet Trade Unions*. (Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1950), pp. 1—2.

The analysis is correct—and moreover of much deeper significance than Deutscher probably realised. The Russian trade unions of 1917 reflected this peculiar development of the Russian working class movement.

On the one hand the unions were the auxiliaries of the political parties, which utilised them for recruiting purposes and as a mass to be manoeuvred.* On the other hand the union movement, reborn in a sense after February 1917, was pushed forward by the more educated workers: the leadership of the various unions reflected the predominance of a sort of intellectual elite, favourable at first to the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, but later won over, in varying proportions, to the Bolsheviks.

It is important to realise that from the beginning of the Revolution the unions were tightly controlled by political organisations, which used them to solicit support for their various actions. This explains the ease with which the Party was able—at a later date—to manipulate the unions. It also helps one understand the fact that the unions (and their problems) were often to prove the battleground on which political differences between the Party leaders were again and again to be fought out. Taken in conjunction with the fact that the Party's whole previous development (including its tightly centralised structure and hierarchical organisational conceptions) had tended to separate it from the working class, one can understand how heavily the cards were stacked against any *autonomous* expression or even voicing of working class aspirations. In a sense these found a freer expression in the Soviets than in either the Party or the trade unions.

Be that as it may trade union membership increased rapidly after February, workers taking advantage of their newly won freedom. 'During the first months of 1917 (union) membership rose from a few scores of thousands to 1.5 million ... But the practical role of the trade unions did not correspond to their numerical strength ... In 1917 strikes never assumed the scale and power they had in 1905 ... The economic ruin of Russia, the galloping inflation, the scarcity of consumers' goods, and so on, made normal "bread and butter" struggle look unreal. In addition the threat of mobilisation hung over would-be strikers. The working class was in no mood to strive for limited economic advantage and partial reforms. The entire social order of Russia was at stake'. (20).

(20) ibid., p. 13.

June–July

Persistent efforts of Mensheviks fully to subordinate the Factory and Plant Committees to the trade unions. These were successfully resisted by a temporary alliance

---

* *We are not here 'denouncing' the fact that the unions were being influenced by political parties. Nor are we advocating anything as simplistic as 'keeping politics out of the unions'. We are simply describing the real state of affairs in Russia in* 1917, *with a view to assessing its significance in the subsequent development of the Russian Revolution.*

of anarchists—objecting on grounds of principle—and of Bolsheviks acting on the basis of tactical considerations.

The autonomous Factory Committee movement found its highest development and most militant expression in the engineering industry. (21) This is of particular relevance as it explains the drastic measures the Bolsheviks had to resort to, in 1922, to break the independent organisations of the engineering workers.

July 26–August 3

Sixth Party Congress.

Milyutin declares: 'We will ride on the crest of the economic wave of the movement of the workers and we will turn this spontaneous movement into a conscious political movement against the existing state power'. (22)

August 7–12

'Second Conference of Factory Committees of Petrograd, its Environs, and Neighbouring Provinces', held at the Smolny Institute.

The Conference resolved that ¼% of the wages of all workers represented should go to support a "Central Soviet of Factory Committees", thus made financially independent of the unions. (23) Rank and file supporters of the Factory Committees viewed the setting up of this 'Central Soviet' with mixed feelings. On the one hand they sensed the need for co-ordination. On the other hand they wanted this co-ordination to be carried out from below, by themselves. Many were suspicious of the motives of the Bolsheviks, on whose initiative the 'Central Soviet' had been bureaucratically set up. The Bolshevik Skrypnik spoke of the difficulties of the Central Soviet of Factory Committees, attributing them 'in part to the workers themselves'. Factory Committees had been reluctant to free their members for work in the Centre'. Some of the Committees 'refrained from participation in the Central Soviet because of Bolshevik predominance in it'. (24) V. M. Levin, another Bolshevik, was to complain that the workers 'didn't distinguish between the conception of control and the conception of taking possession'. (25)

The Second Conference adopted a whole number of statutes, regulating the work of the Committees, the duties of the management (sic!), procedures for electing the Committees, etc. (26) 'All decrees of Factory Committees' were declared compulsory 'for the factory administration as well as for the workers and employees —until such time as those decrees were abolished by the Committee itself, or by the Central Soviet of Factory Committees'. The Committees were to meet regularly *during working hours*. Meetings were to be held on days designated by the Committees themselves. Members of the Committees were to receive full pay—from the employers—while on Committee business. Notice to the appropriate administrative personnel was to be deemed

(21) See Statistics on political strikes in V. L. Meller's and A. M. Pankratova's *Rabocheye dvizheniye v* 1917 *godu* (The Workers' Movement in 1917), pp. 16., 20. Also M. G. Fleer's *Rabocheye dvizheniye v godu voiny* The Workers' Movement in the War Years), Moscow 1925, pp. 4—7.

(22) Shestoi s'yezd RSDRP (b): Protokoly. (The Sixth Congress of the RSDWP (b): Protocols [1917]) Moscow: IMEL, 1934, p. 134.

(23) *Oktyabrskaya revolutsiya i fabzavkomy: materiali po istorii fabrichno-zavidskikh komitetov* (The October Revolution and the Factory Committees: materials for a history of the Factory Commitees). Moscow 1927—1929. 3 vols. I, pp. 229, 259. These volumes (henceforth referred to as *Okt. Rev. i Fabzavkomy*) are the most useful source on the Factory Committees.

(24) ibid., p. 190.

(25) ibid., p. 171.

(26) These are described in great detail in *Okt. Rev. i Fabzavkomy.*

sufficient to free a member of the Factory Committee from work so that he might fulfil his obligations to the Committee. In the periods between meetings, selected members of the Factory Committees were to occupy premises, within the factory, at which they could receive information from the workers and employees. Factory administrations were to provide funds 'for the maintenance of the Committees and the conduct of their affairs'. Factory Committees were to have 'control over the composition of the administration and the right to dismiss all those who could not guarantee normal relations with the workers or who were incompetent for other reasons'. 'All administrative factory personnel can only enter into service with the consent of the Factory Committee, which must declare its (sic!) hirings at a General Meeting of all the factory or through departmental or workshop committees. The 'internal organisation' of the factory (working time, wages, holidays, etc.) was also to be determined by the Factory Committees. Factory Committees were to have their own press and were 'to inform the workers and employees of the enterprise concerning their resolutions by posting an announcement in a conspicuous place'. But, as the Bolshevik Skrypnik realistically reminded the Conference 'we must not forget that these are not normal statutes confirmed by the Government. They are our platform, on the basis of which we will fight'. The basis of the demands was 'customary revolutionary right'.

August 3

Campaign launched by Provisional Government against 'Factory Committees' in the Railways. Kukel, Vice-Minister for the Navy, proposes proclamation of martial law on the Railways and the creation of commissions entitled to 'dissolve the Committees'. (This is the voice of the bourgeoisie in August 1917—not of Trotsky, in August 1920! *See August* 1920).

At a Government-sponsored 'consultation with the rank-and-file' held in Moscow on August 10 the catastrophic condition of the Railways was to be attributed to the existence of the Railway Committees. 'According to an enquiry conducted at a meeting of Railway Managers, 5531 workers had been nominated to participate in these Committees on the 37 main lines. These people were absolved of all commitments to work. On the basis of an average minimum of 2,000 rubles, this little business was costing the Government 11 million rubles. And this only concerned 37 of the 60 main lines. . . ' (27)

At about the same time Struve, a well-known bourgeois ideologist and economist, was writing that 'just as in the military field the elimination of officers by soldiers leads to the destruction of the Army (because it implies a legalisation of revolt incompatible with the very existence of the Army), so in the economic field: the substitution of managerial power by workers management implies the destruction of normal economic order

(27) A. Pankratova. op. cit., p. 25.

and life in the enterprises'. (28)

A little later in the month a Conference of Employers was held in Petrograd. It set up a Union of Employers' Associations. The main function of the new organisation was described by its president Bymanov as 'the elimination of interference by the Factory Committees in what are managerial functions.'

August 11

First issue of *Golos Truda,* published in Russia under banner of the Union of Anarcho-Syndicalist Propaganda.

August 25

Golos Truda, in a famous article headed *'Questions of the Hour'*, wrote: 'We say to the Russian workers, peasants, soldiers, revolutionists: above all, *continue the revolution.* Continue to organise yourselves solidly and to unite your new organisations: your communes, your unions, your committees, your soviets. Continue, with firmness and perseverance, always and everywhere to participate more and more extensively and more and more effectively in the economic life of the country, continue to take into your hands, that is into the hands of your organisations, all the raw materials and all the instruments indispensable to your labour. Continue the Revolution. Do not hesitate to face the solution of the burning questions of the present. Create everywhere the necessary organisations to achieve these solutions. Peasants, take the land and put it at the disposal of your committees. Workers, proceed to put in the hands of and at the disposal of your own social organisations —everywhere on the spot—the mines and the subsoil, the enterprises and the establishments of all sorts, the works and factories, the workshops and the machines'.

A little later, issue No. 15 of the same paper urged its readers to 'begin immediately to organise the social and economic life of the country on new bases. Then a sort of "dictatorship of labour" will begin to be achieved, easily and in a natural manner. And the people would learn, little by little, to do it'.

During this period there were a number of important strikes (tannery and textile workers in Moscow, engineering workers in Petrograd, petrol workers in Baku, miners in the Donbas). 'There was a common feature to these struggles: the employers were prepared to make concessions through increased wages but categorically refused to recognise any rights to the Factory Committees. The workers in struggle . . . were prepared to fight to the bitter end not so much on the question of wage increases as on the question of the recognition of their factory organisations'. (29) One of the main demands was the transfer to the Committees of the rights of hiring and firing. The inadequacies of the 'law' of April 23 were by now widely realised. Demands for the Soviets to take the power were beginning to evoke an echo. 'During its struggle for a "factory constitution" the

(28) ibid., p. 25.

(29) ibid., p. 29. So much for the workers 'only being capable of trade union consciousness'.

working class had become aware of the need itself to manage production'. (30)

August 28

In response to an increasing campaign in the bourgeois journals against the Factory Committees and 'working class anarchism' the Menshevik Minister of Labour Skobelev issued his famous 'Circular No. 421' forbidding meetings of the Factory Committees during working hours ('because of the need to devote every energy and every second to intensive work'). The circular authorised management to deduct from wages time lost by workers in attending Committee meetings. This was at a time when Kornilov was marching on Petrograd, and 'when the workers were rising, threatening, to the defence of the Revolution without considering whether they were doing so during working hours or not'. (31)

September

Bolshevik Party wins majorities in both Petrograd and Moscow Soviets.

September 10

Third Conference of Factory Committees. On September 4, another circular from the Ministry of Labour had stated that the right of hiring and firing of workers belonged to the owners of the enterprise. The Provisional Government, by now very alarmed at the growth of the Factory Committees, was striving desperately to curtail their power.

The Menshevik Kolokolnikov attended the Conference as the representative of the Ministry of Labour. He defended the Circulars. He 'explained' that the circulars did not deprive the workers of the right of *control over* hiring and firing . . . but only of the right to hire and fire. 'As the Bolsheviks were themselves to do later Kolokolnikov defined control as supervision over policy, as opposed to the right of making policy.' (32)

At the conference a worker called Afinogenev asserted that 'all parties, not excluding the Bolsheviks, entice the workers with the promise of the Kingdom of God on earth a hundred years from now . . . We don't need improvement in a hundred years time, but now, immediately.' (33) The Conference, which only lasted two sessions, decreed that it would seek the immediate abolition of the circulars.

September 14

Meeting of the Government-sponsored *Democratic Conference.* Emphasising that the tasks of the Factory Committees were 'essentially different' from those of the trade unions, the Bolsheviks requested 25 seats for the Factory Committees. (The same number had been allocated by the Government to the unions.)

September 26

Lenin writes: 'The Soviet Government must immediately introduce throughout the state workers' control over production and distribution'. 'Failing such control . . . famine and catastrophe of unprecedented dimensions

(30) ibid., p. 36.

(31) *Novy Put* (New Path), October 15, 1917, Nos. 1—2. *Novy Put* was the organ of the Central Soviet of Factory Committees.

(32) F. I. Kaplan. *Bolshevik Ideology.* (P. Owen, London, 1969), p. 83.

(33) *Okt. Rev. i Fabzavkomy,* II, 23.

threaten the country from week to week'. (34)
For several weeks the employers had been resorting to lockouts on an increasing scale in an attempt to break the power of the Committees. Between March and August 1917, 586 enterprises employing over 100,000 workers had been closed down, (35) sometimes because of the lack of fuel or raw materials but often as a deliberate attempt by the employers to evade the increasing power of the Committees. One of the functions of workers' control was seen as putting an end to such practices.

October 1

Publication of Lenin's *'Can the Bolsheviks retain State power?'* This text contains certain passages which help one understand many subsequent events. 'When we say workers' control, always associating that slogan with the dictatorship of the proletariat, and always putting it after the latter, we thereby make plain what state we have in mind... If it is a proletarian state we are referring to (i.e. the dictatorship of the proletariat) then workers' control can become a national, all-embracing, omnipresent, extremely precise and extremely scrupulous *accounting* (emphasis in original) of the prodution and distribution of goods'.

In the same pamphlet Lenin defines the type of 'socialist apparatus' (or framework) within which the function of accountancy (workers' control) will be exercised. *'Without big banks socialism would be impossible of realisation.* The big banks are a "stable apparatus" we need for the realisation of socialism and which we shall *take from capitalism ready made.* Our problem here is only to lop away that ***which*** *capitalistically disfigures* this otherwise excellent apparatus and to make it still *bigger,* still more democratic, still more comprehensive...'. 'A single huge state bank, with branches in every rural district and in every factory —that will already be *nine-tenths of a socialist apparatus'*. According to Lenin this type of apparatus would allow 'general state *book-keeping,* general state accounting of the production and distribution of goods', and would be 'something in the nature, so to speak, of the *skeleton* of a socialist society'. (Lenin's emphasis throughout.)

No one disputes the importance of keeping reliable records but Lenin's indentification of workers' control, in a 'workers' state', with the function of accountancy (i.e. checking the implementation of decisions taken by others) is extremely revealing. Nowhere in Lenin's writings is workers' control ever equated with fundamental decision-taking (i.e. with the *initiation* of decisions) relating to production (how much to produce, how to produce it, at what cost, at whose cost, etc.).

Other writings by Lenin in this period reiterate that one of the functions of workers' control is to prevent sabotage by the higher bureaucrats and functionaries.

(34) V. I. Lenin. The Aims of the Revolution, *Selected Works,* VI, p. 245—6.

(35) V. P. Milyutin. *Istoriya ekonomicheskogo razvitiya SSSR,* 1917—1927 (History of the Economic Development of the USSR), Moscow and Leningrad, 1927, p. 45.

'As for the higher employees . . . we shall have to treat them as we treat the capitalists—roughly. They, like the capitalists, will offer resistance . . . we may suceed with the help of workers' control in rendering such resistance impossible'. (36)

(36) V. I. Lenin. op. cit., pp. 265—7.

Lenin's notions of workers' control (as a means of preventing lock-outs) and his repeated demands for the 'opening of the books' (as a means of preventing economic sabotage) referred both to the immediate situation, *and to the months which were to follow the revolution.* He envisaged a period during which, in a workers' state, the bourgeoisie would still retain the formal ownership and effective management of most of the productive apparatus. The new state, in Lenin's estimation, would not be able immediately to take over the running of industry. There would be a transitional period during which the capitalists would be coerced into co-operation. 'Workers' control' was seen as the instrument of this coercion.

October 10

Fourth Conference of Factory Committees of Petrograd and its Environs. The main business on the agenda was the convocation of the first All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees.

October 13

Golos Truda calls for 'total workers' control, embracing all plant operations, real and not fictitious control, control over work rules, hiring and firing, hours and wages and the procedures of manufacture'.

Soviets and Factory Committees were appearing everywhere at a phenomenal rate. Their growth can be explained by the extremely radical nature of the tasks confronting the working class. Soviets and Committees were far more closely associated with the realities of everyday life than were the unions. They therefore proved far more effective mouthpieces of fundamental popular aspirations.

During this period intensive propaganda was conducted for libertarian ideas. 'Not a single newspaper was closed, not a single leaflet, pamphlet or book confiscated, not a single rally or mass meeting forbidden . . . True the Government at that period was not averse to dealing severely with both Anarchists and Bolsheviks. Kerensky threatened many times to "burn them out with red hot irons". But the Government was powerless, because the Revolution was in full swing'. (37)

(37) G. P. Maximoff. *Syndicalists in the Russian Revolution.* ('Direct Action' pamphlet No. 11), p. 6.

As already pointed out, the Bolsheviks *at this stage* still supported the Factory Committees. They saw them as 'the battering ram that would deal blows to capitalism, organs of class struggle created by the working class on its own ground'. (38) They also saw in the *slogan* of 'workers control' a means of undermining Menshevik influence in the unions. But the Bolsheviks were being 'carried along by a movement which was in many respects embarrassing to them but which, as a main

(38) A. Pankratova. op. cit., p. 5.

driving force of the revolution, they could not fail to endorse'. (39) During the middle of 1917 Bolshevik support for the Factory Committees was such that the Mensheviks were to accuse them of 'abandoning' Marxism in favour of anarchism. 'Actually Lenin and his followers remained firm upholders of the Marxist conception of the centralised state. Their immediate objective, however, was not yet to set up the centralised proletarian dictatorship, but to decentralise as much as possible the bourgeois state and the bourgeois economy. This was a necessary condition for the success of the revolution. In the economic field therefore, the Factory Committee, the organ on the spot, rather than the trade union was the most potent and deadly instrument of upheaval. Thus the trade unions were relegated to the background...' (40)

(39) E. H. Carr. *The Bolshevik Revolution* (Penguin Edition). II, 80.

(40) I. Deutscher. op. cit., pp. 15—16.

This is perhaps the most explicit statement of why the Bolsheviks at this stage supported workers' control and its organisational vehicle, the Factory Committees. Today only the ignorant—or those willing to be deceived—can still kid themselves into believing that proletarian power, *at the point of production,* was ever a fundamental tenet or objective of Bolshevism.

October 17–22

First All Russian Conference of Factory Committees, convened by *Novy Put* (New Path) a paper 'strongly coloured with a new kind of anarcho-syndicalism, though no anarcho-syndicalists were on its staff'. (41)

(41) G. P. Maximoff. op. cit., p. 11—12.

According to later Bolshevik sources, of the 137 delegates attending the Conference there were 86 Bolsheviks, 22 Social-Revolutionaries, 11 anarcho-syndicalists, 8 Mensheviks, 6 'maximalists' and 4 'non-party'. (42) The Bolsheviks were on the verge of seizing power, and their attitude to the Factory Committees was already beginning to change. Shmidt, future Commissar for Labour in Lenin's government, described what had happened in many areas. 'At the moment when the Factory Committees were formed, the trade unions actually did not yet exist. The Factory Committees filled the vacuum'. (43) Another Bolshevik speaker stated 'the growth of the influence of the Factory Committees has naturally occurred at the expense of centralised economic organisations of the working class such as the trade unions. This of course is a highly abnormal development which has in practice led to very undesirable results'. (44)

(42) *Okt. Rev. i Fabzavkomy,* II, 114.

(43) ibid., II, 188.

(44) ibid., II, p. 190.

A different viewpoint was stressed by a delegate from Odessa. He declared that 'the Control Commissions must not be mere checking commissions but must be the *cells of the future,* which even now are preparing for the transfer of production into the hands of the workers'. (45) An anarchist speaker argued 'the trade unions wish to devour the Factory Committees. There is no popular discontent with the Factory Committees, but there is discontent with the trade unions. To the worker the trade

(45) ibid., II, p. 180.

union is a form of organisation imposed from without. The Factory Committee is closer to them'. Returning to a theme that was to recur repeatedly he also emphasised that 'the Factory Committees were cells of the future . . . They, not the State, should now administer'. (46)

Lenin at this stage saw the tremendous importance of the Factory Committees . . . as a means of helping the Bolshevik Party to seize power. According to Ordzhonikidze he asserted 'we must shift the centre of gravity to the Factory Committees. The Factory Committees must become the organs of insurrection. We must change our slogan and instead of saying "All Power to the Soviets", we must say "All Power to the Factory Committees". (47)

A resolution was passed at the Conference proclaiming that 'workers' control—*within the limits assigned to it by the Conference*—was only possible under the political and economic rule of the working class. It warned against 'isolated' and 'disorganised' activities and pointed out that 'the seizure of factories by the workers and their operation for personal profit was incompatible with the aims of the proletariat'. (48)

October 25

Overthrow of Kerensky's Provisional Government. Proclamation of Council of Peoples Commissars (Sovnarkom) during opening session of *Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets.*

October 26

At second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, Bolshevik spokesmen proclaimed: 'The Revolution has been victorious. All power has passed to the Soviets . . . New laws will be proclaimed within a few days dealing with workers' problems. One of the most important will deal with workers' control of production and with the return of industry to normal conditions. Strikes and demonstrations are harmful in Petrograd. We ask you to put an end to all strikes on economic and political issues, to resume work and to carry it out in a perfectly orderly manner . . . Every man to his place. The best way to support the Soviet Government these days is to carry on with one's job'. (49) Without apparently batting an eyelid Pankratova could write that 'the first day of workers' power was ushered in by this call to work and to the edification of the new kind of factory'. (50)

Publication of *'Decree on the Land'*. Lands of nobility, church and crown transferred to custody of peasants.

November 3

Publication in *Pravda* of Lenin's 'Draft Decree on Workers' Control'. (51) This provided for the 'introduction of workers' control of the production, warehousing, purchase and sale of all products and raw materials in all industrial, commercial, banking, agricultural and other enterprises employing a total of not less than five workers and employees—or with a turnover of not less

(46) ibid., II, p. 191.

(47) G. K. Ordzhonikidze. *Izbrannye statii i rechi* 1911—1937 (Selected articles and speeches) Moscow, 1939. p. 124.

(48) A. Pankratova. op. cit., pp. 48—49.

(49) ibid., p. 50.

(50) ibid., p. 51.

(51) V. I. Lenin *Selected Works.* vol. VI, pp. 410—411.

than 10,000 rubles per annum'.

Workers' control was to be 'carried out by all the workers and employees in a given enterprise, either directly if the enterprise is small enough to permit it, or through delegates to be immediately elected at mass meetings. Elected delegates were to 'have access to all books and documents and to all warehouses and stocks of material, instruments and products, without exception'.

These excellent, and often quoted, provisions in fact only listed and legalised what had already been achieved and implemented in many places by the working class in the course of the struggles of the previous months. They were to be followed by three further provisions, of ominous import. It is amazing that these are not better known. In practice they were soon to nullify the positive features of the previous provisions. They stipulated (point 5) that 'the decisions of the elected delegates of the workers and employees were legally binding upon the owners of enterprises' but that they could be *'annulled by trade unions and congresses'* (our emphasis). This was exactly the fate that was to befall the decisions of 'the elected delegates of the workers and employees: the trade unions proved to be the main medium through which the Bolsheviks sought to break the autonomous power of the Factory Committees.

The Draft Decree also stressed (point 6) that 'in all enterprises of state importance' all delegates elected to exercise workers' control were to be 'answerable to the State for the maintenance of the strictest order and discipline and for the protection of property'. Enterprises 'of importance to the State' were defined (point 7) —and this has a familiar tone for all revolutionaries— as *'all enterprises working for defence purposes, or in any way connected with the production of articles necessary for the existence of the masses of the population* (our emphasis). In other words practically any enterprise could be declared by the new Russian State as 'of importance to the State'. The delegates from such an enterprise (elected to exercise workers' control) were now made answerable to a higher authority. Moreover if the trade unions (already fairly bureaucratised) could 'annul' the decisions of rank-and-file delegates, what real power in production had the rank-and-file? The Decree on Workers' Control was soon proved, in practice, not to be worth the paper it was written on.*

November 9

Decree dissolving soviet in the People's Commissariat of Posts and Telegraphs. (52)

(52) *Sobraniye Uzakonenii* 1917—18. (Collection of Statutes 1917—18). No. 3, art. 30.

* *It is quite dishonest for those who should know better (see article by T. Cliff in* Labour Worker *of November* 1967) *to trumpet these decrees on workers' control as something they never were—and were never intended to become.*

The concept of workers' control had spread even to the Civil Service. A soviet of Employees had taken control of the People's Commissariat of Posts and Telegraphs and another had established itself in the Admiralty. On November 9 an appeal was issued by the People's Commissar for the Ministry (sic) of Posts and Telegraphs which concluded 'I declare that no so-called initiatory groups or committees for the administration of the department of Posts and Telegráphs can usurp the functions belonging to the central power and to me as People's Commissar'. (53)

(53) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, p. 77, fn. 1.

November 14

Lenin expected his 'draft statutes on Workers' Control' to be ratified, with only minor modifications, by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets (V.Ts.I.K.) and by the Council of Peoples Commissars (Sovnarkom). In fact his proposals were to give rise to heated discussion and to be criticised from both right and left. Lozovski, a Bolshevik trade unionist, was to write: 'To us, it seemed that the basic control units should only act within limits rigorously determined by higher organs of control. But the comrades who were for the decentralisation of workers control were pressing for the independence and autonomy of these lower organs, because they felt that the masses themselves would incarnate the principle of control'. (54) Lozovski believed that 'the lower organs of control must confine their activities within the limits set by the instructions of the proposed All-Russian Council of Workers Control. We must say it quite clearly and categorically, so that workers in various enterprises don't go away with the idea that the factories belong to them'.

(54) A. Lozovsky. *Rabochii Kontrol* (Workers' Control). Socialist Publishing House, Petrograd 1918, p. 10.

Despite heated protests from the rank and file—and after nearly two weeks of controversy—a 'compromise' was adopted in which the trade union—now the 'unexpected champions of order, discipline and centralised direction of production' (55)—had clearly won the upper hand. *The new text was adopted by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets (V. Ts. I.K.) on November* 14 (*by* 24 *votes to* 10), *ratified by the Council of People's Commissars on November* 15 *and released the following day.* Milyutin, who presented the 'revised decree to the V. Ts. I.K. explained somewhat apologetically that 'life overtook us' and that it had become urgently necessary to 'unite into one solid state apparatus the workers control which was being operated on the spot'. 'Legislation on workers' control which should logically have fitted into the framework of an economic plan had had to precede legislation on the plan itself'. (56) There could be no clearer recognition of the tremendous pressures from below and of the difficulties the Bolsheviks were experiencing in their attempts to canalise them.

(55) E. H. Carr. op. cit., p. 73.

(56) Protokoly zasedanii V Ts I K 2 sozyva (1918), p. 60.

(57) See Appendices to vol. XXII of Lenin's *Sochineniya.* Also article by D. L. Limon on 'Lenine et le Controle Ouvrier' in the December 1967 issue of *Autogestion.*

In the revised decree Lenin's 8 original points had now increased to 14 (57): The new decree started with the

ingenious statement that: 'In the interests of a planned regulation of the national economy' the new Government 'recognised the authority of workers' control throughout the economy'. But there had to be a firm hierarchy of control organs. Factory Committees would be 'allowed' to remain the control organ of each individual enterprise. But each Committee was to be responsible to a 'Regional Council of Workers' Control', subordinated in turn to an '*All-Russian Council of Workers' Control*'. (58) The composition of these higher organs was decided by the Party.

(58) Sbornik dekretov i postanovlenii po narodnomu khozyaistvu (25 oktyabrya 1917 g—25 oktyabrya 1918 g), Moscow 1918, pp. 171—172.

The trade unions were massively represented in the middle and higher strata of this new pyramid of 'institutionalised workers' control'. For instance the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control was to consist of 21 'representatives': 5 from the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviets, 5 from the Executive of the All-Russian Council of Trade Unions, 5 from the Association of Engineers and Technicians, 2 from the Association of Agronomists, 2 from the Petrograd Trade Union Council, 1 from each All-Russian Trade Union Federation numbering fewer than 100,000 members (2 for Federations of over this number) . . . and 5 from the All-Russian Council of Factory Committees! The Factory Committees often under anarcho-syndicalist influence had been well and truly 'cut down to size'.

Long gone were the days when Lenin had asserted 'the source of power is not a law previously discussed and passed by parliament, but the direct initiative of the masses from below, in their localities—outright 'seizure', to use a popular expression'. (59)

(59) V. I. Lenin. *Selected Works*, vol. VI, pp. 27—28.

The very mention however in the decree of an 'All-Russian Council of Factory Committees' meant that side by side with the 'official' structure of organs of 'workers control' another structure was still present, almost inevitably antagonistic: the pyramid of organs representing the Factory Committees. It also shows that the Factory Committee movement was still seeking to co-ordinate its activities on a nation-wide basis. Even this minor representation for the Factory Committees had been a tactical concession on Lenin's part and events were soon to show that the leaders of the Russian government had no intention of accepting for long this potential threat to the hegemony of the Party and of its supporters within the unions. The Party got to work. 'Those who had paid most lip service to workers' control and purported to "expand" it were in fact engaged in a skilful attempt to make it orderly and innocuous by turning it into a large scale, centralised, public institution'. (60)

(60) E. H. Carr. op. cit., p. 75.

Bolshevik propaganda, in later years, was constantly to reiterate the theme that the Factory Committees were not a suitable instrument for organising production on a national scale. Deutscher for instance claims that, almost from their creation, the 'anarchic characteristics

of the Committees made themselves felt: every Factory Committee aspired to have the last and final say on all matters affecting the factory, its output, its stocks of raw material, its conditions of work, etc., and paid little or no attention to the needs of industry as a whole' (61). Yet in the very next sentence Deutscher points out that 'a few weeks after the upheaval (the October revolution) the Factory Committees attempted to form *their own* national organisation, which was to secure their virtual economic dictatorship. The Bolsheviks now called upon the trade unions to render a special service to the nascent Soviet State and to discipline the Factory Committees. The unions came out firmly against the attempt of the Factory Committees to form a national organisation of their own. They prevented the convocation of a planned All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees and demanded total subordination on the part of the Committees'.

(61) I. Deutscher. op. cit., p. 17.

The essential precondition for the Committees to have started tackling regional and national tasks was their federation on a regional and national basis. It is the height of hypocrisy for latter-day Bolsheviks to blame the Committees of 1917-18 for showing only parochial preoccupations when the Party itself was to do all in its power to prevent the committees from federating from below, in an autonomous manner. The Bolshevik-sponsored 'Central Soviet of Factory Committees' was wound up, after the overthrow of the Provisional Government, as quickly as it had been set up. The Revolutionary Centre of Factory Committees, a body of anarchist inspiration which had been going for several months never succeeded in supplanting it, so many were the obstacles put in its path.

Some comments are called for in relation to these developments. The disorganisation created by the war and by the resistance of the employing class (manifested as sabotage or desertion of their enterprises) clearly made it imperative to minimise and if possible eliminate unnecessary struggles, *between Factory Committees,* such as struggles for scanty fuel or raw materials. There was clearly a need to co-ordinate the activity of the Committees on a vast scale, a need of which many who had been most active in the Committee movement were well aware. The point at issue is not that a functional differentiation was found necessary between the various organs of working class power (Soviets, Factory Committees, etc.) or that a definition was sought as to what were local tasks and what were regional or national tasks. The modalities of such a differentiation could have been—and probably would have been—determined by the proposed Congress of Factory Committees. The important thing is that a *hierarchical* pattern of differentiation was *externally* elaborated and imposed, by an agency *other than* the producers themselves.

A Bolshevik spokesman (62) described the situation, as

(62) I. I. Stepanov-Skvortsov. *Ot rabochego kontrolya k rabochemu upravleniyu* (From workers' control to workers' management), Moscow 1918.

seen through the eyes of those now in power. 'Instead of a rapid normalisation of production and distribution, instead of measures which would have led towards a socialist organisation of society, we found a practice which recalled the anarchist dreams of autonomous productive communes'. Pankratova puts the matter even more bluntly: 'During the transitional period one had to accept the negative aspects of workers' control, which was just a method of struggle between capital and labour. But once power had passed into the hands of the proletariat (i.e. into the hands of the Party. M.B.) the practice of the Factory Committees of acting as if they owned the factories became anti-proletarian'. (63)

(63) A. Pankratova. op. cit., p. 54.

These subtleties were however above the heads of most workers. They took Bolshevik propaganda about workers' control at face value. They didn't see it as 'something transitional' or as 'just a stage towards other methods of normalisation of economic life'. (64) For them it was not just a means of combating the economic sabotage of the ruling class or a correct tactical slogan, decided in committee as 'appropriate' to a given stage of the 'developing revolution'. For the masses 'workers' control' was the expression of their deepest aspirations. Who would be boss in the factory? Instinctively they sensed that who managed production would manage all aspects of social life. The subtle difference between 'control' and 'management' of which most Bolsheviks were deeply aware* eluded the masses. The misunderstanding was to have bloody repercussions.

(64) ibid., p. 54.

The November 1917 Decree on Workers' Control appeared to give official sanction to the drive of the working class towards total domination of the conditions of its life. A metalworkers' paper wrote that 'the working class by its nature . . . should occupy the central place both in production and especially in its organisation . . . All production in the future will . . . represent a reflection of the proletarian will and mind'. (65) Whereas before October workers' control had usually taken a passive, observational form, workers' committees now took on an increasingly important role in the overall management of various enterprises. 'For several months following the Revolution the Russian working class enjoyed a degree of freedom and a sense of power probably unique in its history'. (66)

(65) N. Filippov *Ob organizatsii proizvodstva* (On the organisation of production), *Vestnik metallista* (The Metalworker's Herald), January 1918, pp. 40, 43.

(66) P. Avrich. *The Russian Anarchists*, (Princeton, 1967), p. 162.

There is unfortunately little detailed information available concerning this most interesting period. The data available usually come from sources (either bourgeois or

---

* *Unlike so many anarchists of today, most anarchists at the time were also well aware of the difference. Voline (op. cit., p. 77) says: 'the anarchists rejected the vague, nebulous slogan of "control of production". They advocated expropriation — progressive but immediate — of private industry by the organisations of collective production'.*

bureaucratic) fundamentally hostile to the very idea of workers' management and solely concerned in proving its 'inefficiency' and 'impracticability'. An interesting account of what happened at the Nobel Oil refinery has been published. (67) This illustrates the fundamental tendency of the working class towards self-management and the hostility it encountered in Party circles. Other examples will doubtless come to light.

(67) Voline. *Nineteen-Seventeen.* (Freedom Press, 1954), pp. 139—145. Voline's section of 'personal experiences' is well worth reading.

November 28

Meeting of the newly decreed All-Russian Council of Workers' Control.

The previous disagreements reappeared. (68) Larin, representative of the Bolshevik fraction in the unions, declared that 'the trade unions represent the interests of the class as a whole whereas the Factory Committees only represent particular interests. The Factory Committees should be subordinated to the Trade Unions.' Zhivotov, spokesman of the Factory Committee movement, declared: 'In the Factory Committees we elaborate instructions which come from below, with a view to seeing how they can be applied to industry as a whole. These are the instructions of the work shop, of life itself. They are the only instructions that can have real meaning. They show what the Factory Committees are capable of, and should therefore come to the forefront in discussions of workers' control'. The Factory Committees felt that 'control was the task of the committee in each establishment. The committees of each town should then meet . . . and later establish co-ordination on a regional basis'.

(68) See D. L. Limon, op. cit., p. 74.

The setting up of the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control by the Bolsheviks was clearly an attempt to bypass the Committee movement. The attempt proved partly successful. The Factory Committees continued their agitation. But their voice, silenced by administrative means, only evoked a feeble echo within the All-Russian Council itself, dominated as it was by Party nominees. 'In January 1918 Riazanov was to declare that the body had only met once (and in May 1918 that it had never really met at all). According to another source it "tried to meet" but couldn't gather a quorum. (69) What is certain is that it never really functioned at all. It is difficult to say whether this was due to systematic Bolshevik boycott and obstruction, to lack of understanding on the part of non-Bolshevik revolutionaries as to what was actually happening, or whether it was due to the genuine weakness of the movement, unable to burst through the bureaucratic straitjacket in which it was being progressively incarcerated. All three factors probably played a part.

(69) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, p. 75, fn. 3.

November 28

Decree dissolving Soviet in the Admiralty. (70)

(70) *Sobraniye Uzakonenii* 1917—1918, No. 4, art. 58.

December 5

Decree issued (71) setting up a *Supreme Economic Council* (Vesenka) to which were assigned the tasks of

(71) ibid., No. 5, art. 83.

working out 'a plan for the organisation of the economic life of the country and the financial resources of the government'. The Vesenka was to 'direct to a uniform end' the activities of all existing economic authorities, central and local, including the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control. (72) The Vesenka was to be 'attached to the Council of Peoples Commissars' (itself made up entirely of members of the Bolshevik Party).

The composition of the Vesenka was instructive. It comprised a few members of the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control (a very indirect sop to the Factory Committees), massive representation from all the new Commissariats and a number of experts, nominated from above in a 'consultative capacity'. The Vesenka was to have a double structure: a) the 'centres' (Glavki) designed to deal with different sectors of industry, and b) the regional organs: the 'local Council of National Economy' (Sovnarkhozy).

At first the 'left' Bolsheviks held a majority of the leading positions on the Vesenka. The first Chairman was Osinsky and the governing bureau included Bukharin, Larin, Sokolnikov, Milyutin, Lomov and Shmidt. (73) Despite its 'left' leadership the new body 'absorbed' the All-Russian Council of Workers' Control before the latter had even got going. This step was openly acknowledged by the Bolsheviks as a move towards 'statisation' (ogosudarstvleniye) of economic authority. The net effect of the setting up of Vesenka was to silence still further the voice of the Factory Committees. As Lenin put it a few weeks later, 'we passed from workers' control to the creation of the Supreme Council of National Economy'. (74) The function of this Council was clearly to 'replace, absorb and supersede the machinery of workers' control.' (75)

A process can now be discerned, of which the rest of this pamphlet will seek to unravel the unfolding. It is a process which leads, within a short period of 4 years, from the tremendous upsurge of the Factory Committee movement (a movement which both implicitly and explicitly sought to alter the relations of production) to the establishment of unquestioned domination by a monolithic and bureaucratic agency (the Party) over all aspects of economic and political life. This agency not being based on production, its rule could only epitomise the continued limitation of the authority of the workers in the productive process. This necessarily implied the perpetuation of hierarchical relations within production itself, and therefore the perpetuation of class society.

The first stage of this process was the subordination of the Factory Committees to the All-Russian Council for Workers' Control in which the unions (themselves already strongly under Party influence) were heavily represented. The second phase — which almost immediately followed the first—was the incorporation of this All-Russian Council for Workers' Control into

(72) *Natsionalizatsiya promyshlennosti v SSSR: sbornik dokumentov i materialov,* 1917—1920 gg (The nationalisation of industry in the USSR: collected documents and source material) Moscow, 1954. p. 499.

(73) E. H. Carr. op. cit., p. 80.

(74) V. I. Lenin. *Sochineniya,* XXII, 215.

(75) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, p. 80.

the Vesenka, even more heavily weighted in favour of the unions, but also comprising direct nominees of the State (i.e. of the Party). The Vesenka was momentarily allowed to retain a 'left' communist leadership. A little later these 'lefts' were to be removed. A sustained campaign was then launched to curb the power of the unions which, albeit in a very indirect and distorted way, could still be influenced by the working class. It was particularly important to curb such power as the unions still held in relation to production—and to replace it by the authority of direct Party nominees. These managers and administrators, nearly all appointed from above, gradually came to form the basis of the new bureaucracy.

Each of these steps was to be resisted, but each fight was to be lost. Each time the adversary appeared in the garb of the new 'proletarian' power. And each defeat was to make it more difficult for the working class itself directly to manage production, i.e. fundamentally to alter the relations of production. Until these relations of production had been altered the revolution could not really be considered to have achieved its socialist objective, whatever the pronouncements of its leaders. This is the real lesson of the Russian Revolution.

The problem can be envisaged in yet another way. The setting up of the Vesenka represents a partial fusion—in a position of economic authority—of trade union officials, Party stalwarts and 'experts' nominated by the 'workers' state'. But these are not three social categories 'representing the workers'. They were three social categories which were already assuming managerial functions—i.e. were already dominating the workers in production. Because of *their own* antecedent history each of these groups was, for different reasons, already somewhat remote from the working class. Their fusion was to enhance this separation. The result is that from 1918 on, the new State (although officially described as a 'workers' state' or a 'soviet republic'—and although by and large supported by the mass of the working class during the Civil War) was not in fact an institution managed by the working class.*

If one can read between the lines (and not be blinded by words such as 'workers' state' and 'socialist perspective', which only reflect the false consciousness so prevalent at the time) the following account by Pankratova as to what was at stake in the formation of the Vesenka is most informative: 'We needed', she said 'a more efficient form of organisation than the Factory Committees and a more flexible tool than workers'

---

* *It is not a question of counterposing, as various anarchists do, 'the movement of the masses' to 'dictatorship by the state' but of understanding the specific form of the new authority relations which arose at that particular point of history.*

control. We had to link the management of the new factories to the principle of a single economic plan and we had to do it in relation to the socialist perspectives of the young workers' state . . . the Factory Committees lacked practice and technical know-how . . . The enormous economic tasks of the transition period towards socialism necessitated the creation of a single organism to normalise the national economy on a state-wide basis. The proletariat understood this. (This was wishful thinking, if ever there was. M.B.) Freeing the Factory Committees of their mandates, which no longer corresponded to the new economic needs, the workers delegated authority to the newly created organs, the Council of National Economy'. She concludes with a telling sentence: 'The Petrograd Factory Committees, which in May 1917 had proclaimed the need for workers' control, unanimously buried the idea at the time of the 6th Conference'. (76)

(76) A. Pankratova. op. cit., p. 59.

Subsequent events were to show that although these were the aims and perspectives of the Party leadership, they were far from being accepted by the Party rank and file, let alone by the masses, 'on whose behalf' the Party was already assuming the right to speak.

December (early):

Publication of Lenin's *State and Revolution* (which had been written a few months earlier). In this major theoretical work there is little discussion of workers' control and certainly no identification of socialism with 'workers management of production'. Lenin speaks in rather abstract terms of 'immediate change such that *all* fulfil the functions of control and supervision, that *all* become "bureaucrats" for a time, and that *no-one* therefore can become a "bureaucrat".'

This was part of the libertarian rhetoric of the Bolshevism of 1917. But Lenin, as usual, had his feet firmly on the ground. He spelled out what this would mean in practice. The development of capitalism created the 'economic prerequisites' which made it 'quite possible, immediately, overnight after the overthrow of the capitalists and the bureaucrats, to supersede them in the control of production and distribution, in the work of keeping account of labour and its products by the armed workers, by the whole of the armed population'. 'The accountancy and control necessary for this have been so utterly simplified by capitalism that they have become the extraordinarily simple operations of checking, recording and issuing receipts, which anyone who can read and write and who knows the first four rules of arithmetic can perform'. (77) There is no mention of who will initiate the decisions which the masses will then 'check' and 'record'. *State and Revolution* includes the interesting phrase: 'We want the socialist revolution with human nature as it is now, with human nature that cannot dispense with subordination, control and managers'. (78)

(77) V. I. Lenin. *Selected Works*, vol. VII, pp. 92—93.

(78) ibid., p. 47.

The year 1917 certainly saw a tremendous social upheaval. But it was a utopian dream to assume that socialism could be achieved without a large proportion of the population both understanding and wanting it. The building of socialism (unlike the development of capitalism, which can safely be left to market forces) can only be the *self-conscious and collective act of the immense majority*.

December

Publication, by the Central Council of the Petrograd Factory Committees of the famous '*Practical Manual for the implementation of Workers' Control of Industry*'. To the intense annoyance of Party members this was widely distributed in the suburbs of Petrograd.

The main value of this pamphlet is that it deals with how 'workers' control' could rapidly be extended into 'workers' management'. Neither in Lenin's view—nor in that of the authors (despite the title)—was there any confusion between 'control' and 'management'. Lenin was advocating 'workers' control' and his whole practice, after the revolution, was to denounce attempts at workers' management as 'premature', 'utopian', 'anarchist', 'harmful', 'intolerable', etc. It would be tragic if the ahistoricism and anti-theoretical bias of much of the libertarian movement today allowed new militants to fall into old traps or compelled them again to take turnings that at best lead nowhere—or at worst onto the grounds of previous defeats.

The '*Manual*' made a number of concrete suggestions to the Factory Committees. Each Committee should set up four control commissions, 'entitled to invite the attendance of technicians and others in a consultative capacity' (so much for the widely-peddled lie that the Factory Committees were not prepared to associate the technicians or specialists in their work).

The functions of the 4 commissions were to be: a) the organisation of production; b) the reconversion from war production; c) the supply of raw materials; and d) the supply of fuel. The proposals are developed in considerable detail. It is stressed throughout that 'workers' control' is *not* just a question of taking stock of the supplies of raw materials and fuel (c. f. Lenin's: 'Socialism is stocktaking; every time you take stock of iron bars or of pieces of cloth, that is socialism') (79) but that it is intimately related to the transformation of these raw materials within the factory—in other words with the *totality* of the work processes culminating in a finished product.

The 'production commission' should be entrusted with the task of establishing the necessary links between the different sections of the factory, of supervising the state of the machinery, of advising on and overcoming various deficiencies in the arrangement of the factory or plant, *of determining the coefficients of exploitation* in each section, of deciding on the optimum number of shops,

(79) Speech of November 4, 1917 to the Petrograd Workers and Soldiers' Soviet.

and of workers in each shop, of investigating the depreciation of machines and of buildings, of determining job allocations (from the post of administrator down) and of taking charge of the financial relations of the factory.

The authors of the *'Manual'* announce that they intend to group the Factory Committees into Regional Federations and these in turn into an All-Russian Federation. And to be sure there was no misunderstanding they stressed that 'workers' control of industry, as a part of workers' control of the totality of economic life, must not be seen in the narrow sense of a reform of institutions but in the widest possible sense: that of moving into fields previously dominated by others. Control should merge into management'.

In practice the implementation of workers' control took on a variety of forms, in different parts of Russia. These were partly determined by local conditions but primarily by the degree of resistance shown by different sections of the employing class. In some places the employers were expropriated forthwith, 'from below'. In other instances they were merely submitted to a supervisory type of 'control', exercised by the Factory Committees. There was no pre-determined model to follow. The various practices and experiments were at first the subject of heated discussions. These were not a waste of time, as was later to be alleged. They should be seen as essential by all who accepted that the advance towards socialism can only come about through the *self-emancipation* of the working class. The discussions unfortunately were soon to be drawn to a close.

December 13

Isvestiya publishes the *'General Instructions on Workers Control in Conformity with the Decree of November* 14'. These became known as the *'Counter-Manual'* and represent the finished expression of the leninist point of view.*

The first 4 sections deal with the organisation of workers' control in the factories and with the election of control commissions. The next 5 sections decree the duties and rights of these commissions, stressing which functions they should undertake and which should remain the prerogative of the owner-managers. *Section* 5 stresses that insofar as the Commissions play any real role in the management of enterprises, this role should be confined to supervising the carrying out of directives issued by those Central Government agencies 'specifically entrusted with the regulation of economic

(*) *Both the* 'Manual' *and the* 'Counter-Manual' *should be translated into English. An idea of their contents can be obtained from the interesting article by D.L. Limon in the December* 1967 *issue of* 'Autogestion', *although the article degenerates in places into sophisticated Leninist apologetics.*

activity on a national scale.' *Section* 7 states that 'the right to issue orders relating to the management, running and functioning of enterprises remains in the hands of the owner. The control commissions must *not* participate in the management of enterprises and have no responsibilities in relation to their functioning. This responsibility also remains vested in the hands of the owner'.

Section 8 specifies that the commissions should not concern themselves with matters relating to finance, all such matters being the prerogative of the Central Governmental Institutions. *Section* 9 specifically forbids the commissions from expropriating and managing enterprises. They are however entitled to 'raise the question of taking over enterprises with the Government, through the medium of the higher organs of workers' control'. *Section* 14 finally puts down on paper what had been in the minds of the Bolshevik leaders for several weeks. Even at a local level the Factory Committees were to be made to merge with the union apparatus. 'The control commissions in each factory were to constitute the executive organs of the "control of distribution section" of the local trade union federation. The activities of the control commissions should be made to conform with the decisions of the latter'.

The fact that these 'general instructions' were issued within a fortnight of the setting up of the Vesenka clearly shows the systematic lines along which Lenin and his collaborators were thinking They may have been 'right' or they may have been 'wrong'. [This depends on one's ideas of the kind of society they were trying to bring about.] But it is ridiculous to claim—as so many do today—that in 1917 the Bolsheviks really stood for the full, total and direct control by working people of the factories, mines, building sites or other enterprises in which they worked, i.e. that they stood for workers' self-management.

December 20

The official trade union journal *'Professional'ny Vestnik'* (Trade Union Herald) published a 'Resolution concerning the Trade Unions and the Political Parties'. 'Without turning into independent organs of political struggle, into independent political parties or appendages to them, the trade unions cannot remain indifferent to the problems advanced by the political struggle of the proletariat'. After these banal generalities the resolution came down to earth. 'Joining their destiny organisationally with some political party, the trade unions, as fighting class organisations of the proletariat, must support the political slogans and tactics of that proletarian party, which at the given moment approaches more closely than others the solution of the historical tasks, etc. etc . . . '.

The same issue of the paper carried an article by the Bolshevik Lozovsky protesting against the Bolshevik

policy of suppressing by violence workers' strikes against the new government. 'The tasks of the trade unions and of the Soviet power is the isolation of the bourgeois elements who lead strikes and sabotage, but this isolation should not be achieved merely by mechancial means, by arrests, by shipping to the front or by deprivation of bread cards'. 'Preliminary censorship, the destruction of newspapers, the annihilation of freedom of agitation for the socialist and democratic parties is for us absolutely inadmissible. The closing of the newspapers, violence against strikers, etc., irritated open wounds. There has been too much of this type of "action" recently in the memory of the Russian toiling masses and this can lead to an analogy deadly to the Soviet power'.

That a leading Party member should have to speak in this manner is a telling indictment of how widespread these practices must have been. This was increasingly the method by which the Party was seeking to settle its differences not only with its bourgeois opponents but with its more articulate opponents within the working class movement itself. Withdrawal of bread cards deprived those subject to it of the legal right to rations, i.e. of the right to eat. Individuals deprived of their cards would be forced to obtain food on the black market or by other illegal means. Their 'crimes against the State' would then be used as legal means of 'neutralising' them.

It was in this atmosphere concerning Party, unions and non party masses (euphemistically described as 'bourgeois elements') that the big debate of January 1918 was to take place.

December 23

Decree setting up a network of Regional Councils of National Economy (Sovnarkhozy) under the supervision of the Vesenka.

'Each regional Sovnarkhoz was (to be) a replica in miniature of Vesenka at the Centre. It was to be divided into 14 sections for different branches of production and was to contain representatives of local institutions and organisations . . . ' Each Sovnarkhoz could set up 'smaller units incorporating the corresponding organs of workers control where the latter had come into being'. 'What had been created was a central economic department with local offices'. (80)

(80) E. H. Carr, op. cit., II, pp. 82—83.

1918

January 6

Dissolution of Constituent Assembly. The detachment which dispersed the Assembly was led by an anarchist Kronstadt sailor, Zheleznyakov, now commandant of the Tauride Palace Guard. He unseated the Chairman of the Assembly, Victor Chernov, with the blunt announcement: "The guard is tired". (1)

(1) P. Avrich. op. cit., p. 156. (Several secondary references given.)

January 7–14

First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions held in Petrograd.

Two main themes were to dominate the Congress. What were to be the relations between the Factory Committees and the unions? And what were to be the relations between the trade unions and the new Russian state? Few delegates, at this stage, sensed the close relationship between these two questions. Still fewer perceived how a simultaneous resolution of the first question in favour of the unions and of the second in favour of the new 'workers' state' would soon emasculate the Committees and in fact irrevocably undermine the proletarian nature of the regime.

The arguments at this Congress reflected matters of deep significance and will be referred to in some detail. In the balance lay the future of the Russian working class for many decades to come.

According to Lozovsky (a Bolshevik trade unionist) 'the Factory Committees were so much the owners and masters that three months after the Revolution they were to a significant degree independent of the general controlling organs'. (2) Maisky, then still a Menshevik, said that in his experience 'it was not just some of the proletariat, but most of the proletariat, especially in Petrograd, who looked upon workers' control as if it were actually the emergence of the kingdom (tsarstvo) of socialism'. He lamented that among the workers 'the very idea of socialism is embodied in the concept of workers' control'. (3) Another Menshevik delegate deplored the fact that 'an anarchist wave in the shape of Factory Committees and workers' control was sweeping over our

(2) Pervy vserossiiski s'yezd professionalnykh soyuzov, 7-14 yanvarya 1918 g. (First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions, 7-14 January, 1918), Moscow 1918, p. 193. (Henceforth referred to as First Trade Union Congress.)

(3) ibid., p. 212.

Russian Labour movement.' (4) D. B. Ryazanov* a recent convert to Bolshevism, agreed with the Mensheviks on this point and urged the Factory Committees 'to commit suicide by becoming an integral element of the trade union structure'. (5)

The few anarcho-syndicalist delegates to the Congress 'fought a desperate battle to preserve the autonomy of the Committees ... Maximov** claimed that he and his fellow anarcho-syndicalists were "better Marxists" than either the Mensheviks or the Bolsheviks—a declaration which caused a great stir in the hall'. (6) He was alluding no doubt to Marx's statement that the liberation of the working class had to be brought about by the workers themselves.***

Maximov urged the delegates to remember 'that the Factory Committees, organisations introduced directly by life itself in the course of the Revolution, were the closest of all to the working class, much closer than the trade unions'. (7) The function of the Committees was no longer to protect and improve the conditions of the workers. They had to seek a predominant position in industry and in the economy. 'As the offspring of the Revolution the Committees would create a new pro-

(4) ibid., p. 48.

(5) ibid., p. 235.

(6) P. Avrich. op. cit., p. 168.

(7) First Trade Union Congress, p. 85.

---

* *D. B. Ryazanov, a Marxist scholar best known as the historiographer of the International Workingmen's Association (the First International), later became the founder of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow and published a biography of Marx and Engels.*

** *Gregori Petrovich Maximov, born in* 1893. *Graduated as an agronomist in Petrograd in* 1915. *Joined the revolutionary movement while still a student. In* 1918 *joined the Red Army. When the Bolsheviks used the Army for police work and for disarming the workers he refused to obey orders and was sentenced to death. The solidarity of the steelworkers' union saved his life.*

Edited anarcho-syndicalist papers Golos Truda (*Voice of Labour*) *and* Novy Golos Truda (*New Voice of Labour*). *Arrested March* 8, 1921 *during the Kronstadt uprising. Released later that year following a hunger strike, but only after the intervention of European delegates attending Congress of Red Trade Union International. Sought exile abroad.*

In Berlin edited Rabotchi Put (*Labour's Path*), *paper of Russian syndicalists in exile. Later went to Paris and finally settled in Chicago. Died* 1950. *Author of various works on anarchism and on the Bolshevik terror* (The Guillotine at Work, 1940).

*** *It is interesting that as great a 'Marxist' as Rosa Luxemburg was to proclaim, at the founding Congress of the German Communist Party (January* 1919) *that the trade unions were destined to disappear, being replaced by Councils of Workers and Soldiers Deputies and by Factory Committees. (Bericht über die Verhandlung des Gründungparteitages der KPD* (1919), *pp.* 16, 80).

duction on a new basis.' (8) The unions 'which corresponded to the old economic relations of tsarist times had lived out their time and couldn't take on this task'. (9) Maximov anticipated 'a great conflict between state power in the centre and the organisations composed exclusively of workers which are found in the localities'. (10) 'The aim of the proletariat was to co-ordinate all activity, all local interest, to create a centre but not a centre of decrees and ordinances but a centre of regulation, of guidance—and only through such a centre to organise the industrial life of the country'. (11)

Speaking on behalf of the Factory Committees a rank and file worker Belusov, made a scathing attack on the Party leaders. They continually criticised the Committees 'for not acting according to rules and regulations' but then failed to produce any coherent plan of their own. They just talked. 'All this will freeze local work. Are we to stand still locally, wait and do nothing? Only then will we make no mistakes. Only those who do nothing make no mistakes'. Real workers' control was the solution to Russia's economic disintegration. 'The only way out remaining to the workers is to take the factories into their own hands and manage them'. (12)

'Excitement in the Congress reached a climax when Bill Shatov* characterised the trade unions as "living corpses" and urged the working class "to organise in the localities and create a free, new Russia, without a God, without a Tsar, and without a boss in the trade union". When Ryazanov protested Shatov's vilification of the unions, Maximov rose to his comrade's defence, dismissing Ryazanov's objections as those of a white-handed intellectual who had never worked, never sweated, never felt life. Another anarcho-syndicalist delegate, Laptev by name, reminded the gathering that the revolution had been made "not only by the intellectuals, but by the masses"; therefore it was imperative for Russia to "listen to the voice of the working masses, the voice from below".' (13)

The anarcho-syndicalist resolution calling for 'real workers' control, not state workers' control', and

(8) ibid., p. 239.

(9) ibid., p. 215.

(10) ibid., p. 85.

(11) ibid., p. 85.

(12) ibid., p. 221.

(13) P. Avrich. op. cit., pp. 168-169.

---

* *Vladimir Shatov, born in Russia, emigrated to Canada and USA. In* 1914 *secretly reprinted* 100,000 *copies of Margaret Sanger's notorious birth-control pamphlet* Family limitation. *Worked as machinist, longshoreman and printer. Joined IWW. Later helped produce* Golos Truda, *weekly anarcho-syndicalist organ of the Union of Russian workers of the United States and Canada. Returned to Petrograd in July* 1917 *and 'replanted* Golos Truda *in the Russian capital'. Later became member of Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee and an officer of the* 10*th Red Army. In* 1919 *played important role in defence of Petrograd against Yudenich. In* 1920 *became Minister of Transport in the Far Eastern Soviet Republic. Disappeared during the* 1936-38 *purges.*

urging 'that the organisation of production, transport and distribution be immediately transferred to the hands of the toiling people themselves and not to the state or some civil service machine made up of one kind or other of class enemy' was defeated. [The main strength of the anarcho-syndicalists was among the miners of the Debaltzev district in the Don Basin, among the port-workers and cement workers of Ekaterinodar and Novorossiysk and among the Moscow railway workers. At the Congress they had 25 delegates (on the basis of one delegate per 3,000-3,500 members). (14)]

(14) G. P. Maximov. op. cit., pp. 12-13.

The new government would have none of all this talk about extending the power of the Committees. It clearly recognised in the unions a 'more stable' and 'less anarchic' force (i.e. a force more amenable to control from above) in which it could provisionally vest administrative functions in industry. The Bolsheviks therefore urged 'the trade union organisations, as class organisations of the proletariat constructed according to the industrial principle, to take upon themselves the main task of organising production and of restoring the weakened productive forces of the country'. (15) (At a later stage the Bolsheviks were to fight tooth and nail to divest the unions of these very functions and place them firmly in the hands of Party nominees. In fact the Party demands of January 1918 were again and again to be thrown back in the face of the Bolshevik leaders during the next 3 years. This will be dealt with further on.)

(15) Quoted by A. S. Shlyapnikov, *Die Russischen Gewerkshaften* (The Russian Trade Unions), Leipzig, 1920. (In German.)

The Congress, with its overwhelming Bolshevik majority, voted to transform the Factory Committees into union organs. (16) The Menshevik and Social-Revolutionary delegates voted *with* the Bolsheviks for a resolution proclaiming that 'the centralisation of workers' control was the task of the trade unions'. (17) 'Workers' control' was defined as 'the instrument by which the universal economic plan must be put into effect locally'. (18) 'It implied the definite idea of standardisation in the sphere of production'. (19) It was too bad if the workers read more into the term than this. 'Just because the workers misunderstand and falsely interpret workers' control is no reason to repudiate it'. (20) What the Party meant by workers' control was spelt out in some detail. It meant, inter alia, that 'it was not within the competence of the lower organs of workers' control to be entrusted with financial control function . . . this should rest with the highest organs of control, with the general apparatus of management, with the Supreme Council of National Economy. In the sphere of finance everything must be left to the higher organs of workers' control'. (21) 'For workers' control to be of maximum use to the proletariat it was absolutely necessary to refrain from atomising it. Workers of individual enterprises should not be left the right to make final decisions on questions touching upon the existence of the enterprise'. (22) A lot of re-education was needed and this was to be entrusted

(16) First Trade Union Congress, p. 374.

(17) ibid., pp. 369-370.

(18) ibid., p. 369.

(19) ibid., p. 192.

(20) ibid., p. 230.

(21) ibid., p. 195.

(22) ibid., p. 369.

to the 'economic control commissions' of the unions. They were to inculcate into the ranks of the workers the Bolshevik conception of workers' control. 'The trade unions must go over each decree of the Factory Committees in the sphere of control, explain through their delegates at the factories and shops that control over production does *not* mean the transfer of the enterprise into the hands of the workers of a given enterprise, that it does *not* equal the socialisation of production and exchange'. (23) Once the Committees had been 'devoured' the unions were to be the intermediate agency through which workers' control was gradually to be converted into state control.

(23) ibid., Adopted Resolution, p. 370.

These were not abstract discussions. Underlying the controversies, what was at stake was the whole concept of socialism: workers' power or the power of the Party acting 'on behalf of' the working class. 'If workers succeeded in maintaining their ownership of the factories they had seized, if they ran these factories for themselves, if they considered the revolution to be at an end, if they considered socialism to have been established—then there would have been no need for the revolutionary leadership of the Bolsheviks'. (24)

(24) F. Kaplan. op. cit., p. 128.

The bitterness with which the issue of the Factory Committees was discussed highlights another point. 'Although the Bolsheviks were in a majority at the first All-Russian Conference of Factory Committees—and although as representatives of the Factory Committees they could force resolutions through this Conference—they could not enforce resolutions against the opposition of the Factory Committees themselves . . .The Factory Committees accepted Bolshevik leadership only so long as divergences in goals were not brought to the test'. (25)

(25) ibid., p. 181.

The First Trade Union Congress also witnessed a heated controversy on the question of the relation of the trade unions to the state. The Mensheviks claiming that the revolution could only usher in a bourgeois-democratic republic, insisted on the autonomy of the unions in relation to the new Russian state. As Maisky put it: 'If capitalism remains intact, the tasks with which trade unions are confronted under capitalism remain unaltered'. (26) Others too felt that capitalism would reassert itself and that the unions should do nothing that would impair their power. Martov put a more sophisticated viewpoint: 'In this historic situation' he said 'this government cannot represent the working class alone. It cannot but be a *de facto* administration connected with a heterogeneous mass of toiling people, with proletarian and non-proletarian elements alike. It cannot therefore conduct its *economic* policy along the lines of consistently and clearly expressed working class interests'. (27) The trade unions could. Therefore the trade unions should retain a certain independence in relation to the new state. It is interesting that in his 1921

(26) First Trade Union Congress, p. 11.

(27) ibid., p. 80.

controversy with Trotsky—when incidentally it was far too late—Lenin was to use much the same kind of argument. He was to stress the need for the workers to defend themselves against 'their own' state, defined as not just a 'workers' state, but a workers and peasants' state' and moreover one with 'bureaucratic deformations'.

The Bolshevik viewpoint, supported by Lenin and Trotsky and voiced by Zinoviev, was that the trade unions should be subordinated to the government, although not assimilated with it. Trade union neutrality was officially labelled a 'bourgeois' idea, an anomaly in a workers' state. (28) The resolution adopted by the Congress clearly expressed these dominant ideas:

(28) ibid., p. 364.

'The trade unions ought to shoulder the main burden of organising production and of rehabilitating the country's shattered economic forces. Their most urgent tasks consist in their energetic participation in all central bodies called upon to regulate output, in the organisation of workers' control (sic!), in the registration and distribution of the labour force, in the organisation of exchange between town and countryside . . . in the struggle against sabotage and in enforcing the general obligation to work. . .

'As they develop the trade unions should, in the process of the present socialist revolution, become organs of socialist power, and as such they should work in co-ordination with and *subordination* to other bodies in order to carry into effect the new principles. . . The Congress is convinced that in consequence of the foreshadowed process, *the trade unions will inevitably become transformed into organs of the socialist state.* Participation in the trade unions will for all people employed in any industry be their duty vis-à-vis the State'.

The Bolsheviks did not unanimously accept Lenin's views on these questions. While Tomsky, their main spokesman on trade union affairs, pointed out that 'sectional interests of groups of workers had to be subordinated to the interests of the entire class' (29)—which like so many Bolsheviks he wrongly identified with the hegemony of the Bolshevik Party—Ryazanov argued that 'as long as the social revolution begun here has not merged with the social revolution of Europe and of the whole world . . . the Russian proletariat . . . must be on its guard and must not renounce a single one of its weapons . . .it must maintain its trade union organisation'. (30) According to Zinoviev, the 'independence' of the trade unions under a workers' government could mean nothing except the right to support 'saboteurs'. Despite this Tsyperovich, a prominent Bolshevik trade unionist, proposed that the Congress ratify the right of unions to continue to resort to strike action in defence of their members. A resolution to this effect was however defeated (31).

(29) ibid., preface.

(30) ibid., p. 27.

(31) ibid., p. 367.

As might be expected the dominant attitude of the dominant Party (both in relation to the Factory Committees and in relation to the unions) was to play an important role in the subsequent development of events. It was to prove as much an 'objective fact of history' as the 'devastation' and the 'atomisation of the working class' caused by the (subsequent) Civil War. It could in fact be argued that Bolshevik attitudes to the Factory Committees (and the dashing of the great hopes that these Committees represented for hundreds of thousands of workers) were to engender or reinforce working class apathy and cynicism, and contribute to absenteeism and to the seeking of private solutions to what were social problems, all of which the Bolsheviks were so loudly to decry. It is above all essential to stress that the Bolshevik policy in relation to the Committees and to the unions which we have documented in some detail was being put forward twelve months *before* the murder of Karl Liebknecht and of Rosa Luxemburg—i.e. before the irrevocable failure of the German revolution, an event usually taken as 'justifying' many of the measures taken by the Russian rulers.

January 15–21

First All-Russian Congress of Textile Workers held in Moscow. Bolsheviks in a majority. The Congress declared that 'workers' control is only a transitional step to the planned organisation of production and distribution'. (32) The union adopted new statutes proclaiming that 'the lowest cell of the union is the Factory Committee whose obligation consists of putting into effect, in a given enterprise, all the decrees of the union'. (33) Even the big stick was waved. Addressing the Congress. Lozovsky stated that 'if the local patriotism of individual factories conflicts with the interests of the whole proletariat, we unconditionally state that we will not hesitate before *any measures* (my emphasis. M.B.) for the suppression of tendencies harmful to the toilers'. (34) The Party, in other words, can impose *its* concept of the interests of the working class, even against the workers themselves.

(32) *Vsesoyuzny s'yezd professionalnykh soyuzov tekstilshchikov i fabrichnykh komitetov* (Moscow 1918), p. 8.

(33) ibid., p. 5.

(34) ibid., p. 30.

January 23–31

Third All-Russian Congress of Soviets

February

Bolshevik decree nationalising the land.

March 3

Signature of *Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty.*

Decree issued by Vesenka defining the functions of technical management in industry. Each administrative centre was to appoint to every enterprise under its care a *commissioner* (who would be the government representative and supervisor) and *two directors* (one technical and the other administrative). The technical director could only be overruled by the government commissioner or by the 'Central Direction' of the industry. (In other words only the 'administrative director' was

under some kind of control from below).

The decree laid down the principle that 'in nationalised enterprises workers' control is exercised by submitting all declarations and decisions of the Factory or Shop Committee, or of the control commission, to the Economic Administrative Council for approval'. 'Not more than half the members of the Administrative Council should be workers or employees'. (35)

(35) Sbornik dekretov i postanovlenii po narodnomu, khozyaistvu (1918), pp. 311-315.

During the early months of 1918 the Vesenka had begun to build, from the top, its 'unified administration' of particular industries. The pattern was informative. During 1915 and 1916 the Tsarist government had set up central bodies (sometimes called 'committees' and sometimes 'centres') governing the activities of industries producing commodities directly or indirectly necessary for the war. By 1917 these central bodies (generally composed of representatives of the industry concerned and exercising regulatory functions of a rather undefined character) had spread over almost the whole field of industrial production. During the first half of 1918 Vesenka gradually took over these bodies (or what was left of them) and converted them—under the name of *glavki* (chief committees) or *tsentry* (centres)—into administrative organs subject to the direction and control of Vesenka. The 'chief committee' for the leather industry (Glavkozh) was set up in January 1918. This was quickly followed by chief paper and sugar committees, and by soap and tea 'centres'. These, together with Tsentrotekstil were all in existence by March 1918. They 'could scarcely have come into being except on foundations already laid before the revolution or without the collaboration of the managerial and technical staffs. . . A certain tacit community of interests could be detected between the government and the more sensible and moderate of the industrialists in bringing about a return to some kind of orderly production.' (36)

(36) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, 86-87.

This raised a question of considerable theoretical interest. Marxists have usually argued that revolutionaries could not simply seize the political institutions of bourgeois society (parliament, etc.) and use them for different purposes (i.e. for the introduction of socialism). They have always claimed that new political institutions (soviets) would have to be created to express the reality of workers' power. But they have usually remained discreetly silent on the question of whether revolutionaries could 'capture' the institutions of bourgeois economic power and use them to their own ends—or whether these too would have first to be smashed, and later replaced with a new kind of institution, representing a fundamental change in the relations of production. The Bolsheviks in 1918 clearly opted for the first course. (see p. 41.) Even within their own ranks this choice was to give rise to foreboding that all energies would now be directed to the 'reinforcement and development of productive capacity, to organic construction, *involving a*

refusal to continue the break up of capitalist productive relations and even a partial restoration of them'. (37)

(37) ibid., II, 95.

March 6–8

Seventh Party Congress

Heated deliberations during this very short Congress centred on the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty.

March 14–18

Fourth All-Russian Congress of Soviets.

March

'Left' communists (Osinsky, Bukharin, Lomov, Smirnov) ousted from leading positions in Supreme Economic Council—partly because of their attitude to Brest-Litovsk—and replaced by 'moderates' like Milyutin and Rykov. (38) Immediate steps taken to shore-up managerial authority, restore labour discipline and apply wage incentives under the supervision of the trade union organisations. The whole episode was a clear demonstration that 'lefts' in top administrative positions are no substitute for rank and file control at the point of production.

(38) ibid., II, 91.

March 26

Isvestiya of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee publishes Decree (issued by the Council of Peoples Commissars) on the 'centralisation of railway management'. This decree, which ended workers' control on the railways was 'an absolutely necessary prerequisite for the improvement of the conditions of the transport system'. (39) It stressed the urgency of 'iron labour discipline' and 'individual management' on the railways and granted 'dictatorial' powers to the Commissariat of Ways of Communication. Clause 6 proclaimed the need for selected individuals to act as 'administrative-technical executives' in every local, district or regional railway centre. These individuals were to be 'responsible to the People's Commissars of Ways of Communication'. They were to be 'the embodiment of the whole of the dictatorial power of the proletariat in the given railway centre'. (40)

(39) V. I. Lenin. *Selected Works*, vol. VII, Explanatory Notes, p. 505

(40) ibid.

March 30

Trotsky, appointed Commissar of Military Affairs after Brest-Litovsk, had rapidly been reorganising the Red Army. The death penalty for disobedience under fire had been restored. So, more gradually, had saluting, special forms of address, separate living quarters and other privileges for officers.* Democratic forms of organisation, including the election of officers, had been quickly dispensed with. 'The elective basis', Trotsky wrote, 'is politically pointless and technically inexpedient and has

* *For years, Trotskyist literature has denounced these reactionary facets of the Red Army as examples of what happened to it 'under Stalinism'. They were in fact first challenged by Smirnov, at the Eighth Party Congress, in March* 1919.

already been set aside by decree'. (41) N. V. Krylenko, one of the co-commissars of Military Affairs appointed after the October Revolution, had resigned in disgust from the Defence Establishment (42) as a result of these measures.

(41) L. Trotsky. 'Work, Discipline, Order', *Sochineniya*, XVII, pp. 171-172.

(42) N. V. Krylenko. Autobiography in Ency. Dict. XLI—1, Appendix, p. 246.

April 3

The Central Council of Trade Unions issued its first detailed pronouncement on the function of the trade unions in relation to 'labour discipline' and 'incentives'.

The trade unions should 'apply all their efforts to raise the productivity of labour and consistently to create in factories and workshops the indispensable foundations of labour discipline'. Every union should establish a commission 'to fix norms of productivity for every trade and category of workers'. The use of piece rates 'to raise the productivity of labour' was conceded. It was claimed that 'bonuses for increased productivity above the established norm may within certain limits be a useful measure for raising productivity without exhausting the worker'. Finally if 'individual groups of workers' refused to submit to union discipline, they could in the last resort be expelled from the union 'with all the consequences that flow therefrom'. (43)

(43) *Narodnoye Khozyaistvo* No. 2, 1918, p. 38.

April 11–12

Armed detachments of Cheka raid 26 anarchist centres in Moscow. Fighting breaks out between Cheka agents and Black Guardsmen in Donskoi Monastery. Forty anarchists killed or wounded, over 500 taken prisoners.

April 20

The issue of workers' control was now being widely discussed within the Party. Leningrad District Committee publishes *first issue of Kommunist* (a 'left' communist theoretical journal edited by Bukharin, Radek and Osinsky, later to be joined by Smirnov). This issue contained the editors' *'Theses on the Present Situation'*. The paper denounced 'a labour policy designed to implant discipline among the workers under the flag of "self-discipline", the introduction of labour service for workers, piece rates, and the lengthening of the working day'. It proclaimed that 'the introduction of labour discipline in connection with the restoration of capitalist management of industry cannot really increase the productivity of labour'. It would 'diminish the class initiative, activity and organisation of the proletariat. It threatens to enslave the working class. It will arouse discontent among the backward elements as well as among the vanguard of the proletariat. In order to introduce this system in the face of the hatred prevailing at present among the proletariat against the "capitalist saboteurs" the Communist Party would have to rely on the petty-bourgeoisie, as against the workers'. It would 'ruin itself as the party of the proletariat'.

The first issue of the new paper also contained a serious warning by Radek: 'If the Russian Revolution were

overthrown by violence on the part of the bourgeois counter-revolution, it would rise again like a phoenix; if however it lost its socialist character and thereby disappointed the working masses, the blow would have ten times more terrible consequences for the future of the Russian and the international revolution'. (44) The same issue warned of 'bureaucratic centralisation, the rule of various commissars, the loss of independence for local soviets and in practice the rejection of the type of state-commune administered from below'. (45) 'It was all very well', Bukharin pointed out, 'to say as Lenin had (in *State and Revolution*) that each cook should learn to manage the State. But what happened when each cook had a commissar appointed to order him about?'.

The second issue of the paper contained some prophetic comments by Osinsky: 'We stand for the construction of the proletarian society by the class creativity of the workers themselves, not by the ukases of the captains of industry. . . If the proletariat itself does not know how to create the necessary prerequisites for the socialist organisation of labour, no one can do this for it and no one can compel it to do this. The stick, if raised against the workers, will find itself in the hands of a social force which is either under the influence of another social class or is in the hands of the soviet power; but the soviet power will then be forced to seek support against the proletariat from another class (e.g. the peasantry) and by this it will destroy itself as the dictatorship of the proletariat. Socialism and socialist organisation will be set up by the proletariat itself, or they will not be set up at all: something else will be set up—state capitalism'. (46)

Lenin reacted very sharply. The usual vituperation followed. The views of the 'left' Communists were 'a disgrace', 'a complete renunciation of communism in practice', 'a desertion to the camp of the petty bourgeoisie'. (47) The left were being 'provoked by the Isuvs (Mensheviks) and other Judases of capitalism'. A campaign was whipped up in Leningrad which compelled *Kommunist* to transfer publication to Moscow, where the paper reappeared first under the auspices of the Moscow Regional Organisation of the Party, later as the 'unofficial' mouthpiece of a group of comrades. After the appearance of the first issue of the paper a hastily convened Leningrad Party Conference produced a majority for Lenin and 'demanded that the adherents of *Kommunist* cease their separate organisational existence'. (48) So much for alleged factional rights . . . in 1918! (i.e. long before the 10th Congress officially prohibited factions—in 1921)

During the following months the Leninists succeeded in extending their organisational control into areas which had originally backed the 'lefts'. By the end of May the

(44) K. Radek. *'Posle pyati-mesyatsev'* (After five months), *Kommunist*, No. 1, April 1918, pp. 3-4.

(45) *Kommunist*, No. 1. *'Tesisy o tekushchem momente'* (Theses on the Current Situation), p. 8.

(46) Osinsky. *'O stroitelstve sotsialisma'* (On the building of Socialism), *Kommunist*, No. 2, April 1918, p.5. It was already obvious to some, *in* 1918, in which direction Leninist economic policy was leading. Those who, today, claim to be both, 'leninists' and 'state capitalists' in relation to Russia, please note!

(47) V. I. Lenin. 'Left-wing childishness and petty-bourgeois mentality', *Selected Works*, vol. VII, p. 374.

(48) V. Sorin. *'Partiya i oppozitsiya'* (The Party and the Opposition), I, Fraktsiya levykh kommunistov (The fraction of left communists), Moscow 1925, pp. 21-22.

predominantly proletarian Party organisation in the Ural region, led by Preobrazhensky, and the Moscow Regional Bureau of the Party had been won back by the supporters of the Party leadership. The fourth and final issue of *Kommunist* (May 1918) had to be published as a private factional paper. The settlement of these important issues, profoundly affecting the whole working class, had not been 'by discussion, persuasion or compromise, but by a high pressure campaign in the Party organisations, backed by a barrage of violent invective in the Party press and in the pronouncements of the Party leaders. Lenin's polemics set the tone and his organisational lieutenants brought the membership into line'. (49) Many in the traditional revolutionary movement will be thoroughly familiar with these methods!

(49) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 87.

April 28

Lenin's article on *'The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government'* published in *Isvestiya* of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. 'Measures and decrees' were called for 'to raise labour discipline' which was 'the condition of economic revival'. (Among the measures suggested were the introduction of a card system for registering the productivity of each worker, the introduction of factory regulations in every enterprise, the establishment of rate of output bureaux for the purpose of fixing the output of each worker and payment of bonuses for increased productivity.) If Lenin ever sensed the potentially harmful aspects of these proposals he certainly never mentioned it. No great imagination was needed, however, to see in the pen pushers (recording the 'productivity of each worker') and in the clerks (manning the 'rate of output bureaux') the as yet amorphous elements of a new bureaucracy.

Lenin went even further. He wrote: 'We must raise the question of piece-work and apply and test it in practice . . . we must raise the question of applying much of what is scientific and progressive in the Taylor system (50) . . . the Soviet Republic must at all costs adopt all that is valuable in the achievements of science and technology in this field . . . we must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system'. Only 'the conscious representatives of petty bourgeois laxity' could see in the recent decree on the management of the railways 'which granted individual leaders dictatorial powers' some kind of 'departure from the collegium principle, from democracy and from other principles of soviet government'. 'The irrefutable experience of history has shown that . . . the dictatorship of individual persons was very often the vehicle, the channel of the dictatorship of the revolutionary classes'. 'Large-scale machine industry—which is the material productive source and foundation of socialism—calls for absolute and strict unity of will . . . How can strict unity of will be ensured? By thou-

(50) Before the Revolution Lenin had denounced Taylorism as 'the enslavement of man by the machine'. (*Sochineniya*, XVII, 247-8).

sands subordinating their will to the will of one'. '*Unquestioning submission* (emphasis in original) to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of labour processes that are based on large-scale machine industry . . . today the Revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses *unquestioningly obey the single will* (emphasis in original) of the leaders of the labour process'. (51) The demand for 'unquestioning' obedience has, throughout history, been voiced by countless reactionaries, who have sought moreover to impose such obedience on those over whom they exerted authority. A highly critical (and self-critical) attitude is, on the other hand, the hallmark of the real revolutionary.

(51) V. I. Lenin. ***Selected Works,*** Vol. VII, pp. 332-3, 340-2.

May

Burevestnik, Anarkhia, Golos Truda and other leading anarchist periodicals closed down.

May

Preobrazhensky, writing in *Kommunist,* warns: 'The Party will soon have to decide to what degree the dictatorship of individuals will be extended from the railroads and other branches of the economy to the Party itself'. (52)

(52) ***Kommunist,*** **No. 4.**

May 5

Publication of '*Left wing childishness and petty-bourgeois mentality*'. After denouncing *Kommunist's* views as 'a riot of phrasemongering', 'the flaunting of high sounding phrases', etc, etc, etc, Lenin attempted to answer some of the points made by the left communists. According to Lenin 'state capitalism' wasn't a danger. It was, on the contrary, something to be aimed for. 'If we introduced state capitalism in approximately 6 months' time we would achieve a great success and a sure guarantee that within a year socialism will have gained a permanently firm hold and will have become invincible in our country'. 'Economically, state capitalism is immeasurably superior to the present system of economy . . . the soviet power has nothing terrible to fear from it, for the soviet State is a state in which the power of the workers and the poor is assured' (because a 'Workers' Party' held political power). The '*sum total* of the necessary conditions for socialism' were 'large-scale capitalist technique based on the last word of modern science . . . inconceivable without planned state organisation which subjects tens of millions of people to the strictest observance of a single standard in production and distribution' and 'proletarian state power'. [It is important to note that the power of the working class *in production* isn't mentioned as one of the 'necessary conditions for socialism'.] Lenin continues by pointing out that in 1918 the 'two unconnected halves of socialism existed side by side like two future chickens in a single shell of international imperialism'. In 1918 Germany and Russia were the embodiments, respectively, of the 'economic, productive and social

economic conditions for socialism on the one hand, and of the political conditions on the other'. The task of the Bolsheviks was 'to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare no effort at copying it'. They shouldn't 'shrink from adopting dictatorial methods to hasten the copying of it'. As originally published (53) Lenin's text then contained the interesting phrase: 'Our task is to hasten this—even more than Peter hastened the adoption of westernism by barbarian Russia, not shrinking from the use of barbarous methods to fight barbarism'. This was perhaps the only admiring reference to any Tsar, in any of Lenin's writings. In quoting this passage three years later Lenin omitted the reference to Peter the Great. (54)

(53) V. I. Lenin. *Sochineniya*, XXII, 516-517.

(54) ibid., XXVI, 326.

'One and the same road', Lenin continued, 'led from the petty bourgeois capitalism that prevailed in Russia in 1918 to large-scale capitalism and to socialism, through one and the same intermediary station called "national accounting and control of production and distribution". Fighting against state capitalism, in April 1918, was (according to Lenin) "beating the air". (55) The allegation that the Soviet Republic was threatened with 'evolution in the direction of state capitalism' would 'provoke nothing but Homeric laughter'. If a merchant told him that there had been an improvement on some railways 'such praise seems to me a thousand times more valuable than twenty communist resolutions'. (56) When reading passages such as the above, it is difficult to understand how some comrades can simultaneously claim to be 'leninists' and claim that the Russian society is a form of state capitalism to be deplored. Some, however, manage to do just this.

(55) V. I. Lenin. *Selected Works*, vol. VII, pp. 360-66.

(56) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, 100.

It is crystal clear from the above (and from other passages written at the time) that the 'proletarian' nature of the regime was seen by nearly all the Bolshevik leaders as hinging on the proletarian nature of the Party that had taken state power. None of them saw the proletarian nature of the Russian regime as primarily and crucially dependent on the exercise of workers' power *at the point of production* (i.e. on workers' management of production). It should have been obvious to them, as Marxists, that if the working class did not hold economic power, its 'political' power would at best be insecure and would in fact soon degenerate. The Bolshevik leaders saw the capitalist organisation of production as something which, in itself, was socially neutral. It could be used indifferently for *bad* purposes (as when the bourgeoisie used it with the aim of private accumulation) or *good* ones (as when the 'workers' state' used it 'for the benefit of the many'). Lenin put this quite bluntly. 'Socialism' he said, 'is nothing but state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the whole people'. (57) What was wrong with capitalist methods of production, in Lenin's eyes, was that they had in the past served the bourgeoisie. They were now going to be used

(57) V. I. Lenin. *'The threatening catastrophe and how to fight it'.*

by the Workers' State and would thereby become 'one of the conditions of socialism'. It all depended on who held state power. (58) The argument that Russia was a workers' state *because of* the nationalisation of the means of production was only put forward by Trotsky . . . in 1936! He was trying to reconcile his view that 'the Soviet Union had to be defended' with his view that 'the Bolshevik Party was no longer a workers' party'.

(58) For a fuller analysis of this conception of means and ends—and of what it led to—see Paul Cardan's *'From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy'*, *Solidarity* Pamphlet No. 24.

May 24–June 4

First All-Russian Congress of Regional Economic Councils held in Moscow. This 'economic Parliament' was attended by rather more than 100 voting delegates (and 150 non-voting delegates) drawn from Vesenka, its 'glavki' and centres, from regional and local Sovnarkhozy and from the trade unions.

The Congress was presided over by Rykov—a man of 'unimpeachable record and colourless opinions'. (59) Lenin opened the proceedings with a plea for 'labour discipline' and a long explanation for the need to employ the highly paid 'spetsy' (specialists).

(59) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, 101. fn 4.

Osinsky stood uncompromisingly for the democratisation of industry. He led an attack on 'piece rates' and 'Taylorism'. He was supported by Smirnov and a number of provincial delegates. The 'opposition' urged the recognition and completion of the de facto nationalisation of industry which the Factory Committees were bringing about and called for the establishment of an overall national economic authority based on and representing the organs of workers' control. (60) They called for 'a workers administration . . . not only from above but from below' as the indispensable economic base for the new regime. Lomov, in a plea for a massive extension of workers' control, warned that bureaucratic centralisation . . . was strangling the forces of the country. The masses are being cut off from living, creative power in all branches of our economy'. He reminded the Congress that Lenin's phrase about 'learning from the capitalists' had been coined in the eighteen-nineties by the quasi-Marxist (and present bourgeois) Struve. (61)

(60) Osinsky, in *Trudy pervogo vserossiiskogo s'yezda sovetov narodnogo khozyaistva* (Proceedings of the First All-Russian Congress of Economic Councils) Moscow, 1918, pp. 61-64.

(61) ibid., p. 75.

There then took place one of those episodes which can highlight a whole discussion and epitomise the various viewpoints. A sub-committee of the Congress passed a resolution that *two-thirds* of the representatives on the management boards of industrial enterprises should be elected from among the workers. (62) Lenin was furious at this 'stupid decision'. Under his guidance a Plenary Session of the Congress 'corrected' the resolution and decreed that no more than *one-third* of the managerial personnel of industrial enterprises should be elected. The management committees were to be integrated into the previously outlined complex hierarchical structure which vested veto rights in the Supreme Economic Council (Vesenka) set up in December 1917. (63)

(62) ibid., p. 65

(63) Polozheniye ob upravlenii natsionalizirovannymi predpriyatiyami (Regulations for the Administration of Nationalised Enterprises), ibid., pp. 477-478.

The Congress formally endorsed a resolution from the Trade Union Central Council asserting the principle of 'a definite, fixed rate of productivity in return for a guaranteed wage'. It accepted the institution of piece work and of bonuses. A 'climate of opinion rather than a settled policy was in the course of formation'. (64)

(64) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, pp. 119-120.

May 25

Clashes between government forces and troops of the Czech legion in the Urals. Anti-bolshevik uprisings throughout Siberia and South Eastern Russia. *Beginning of large-scale civil war and beginning of Allied intervention.* [Those who wish to incriminate the Civil War for anti-proletarian Bolshevik practices can do so from now on.]

June 28

Council of Peoples' Commissars, after an all-night sitting, issues *Decree on General Nationalisation* involving all industrial enterprises with a capital of over one million rubles. The aims of the decree were 'a decisive struggle against disorganisation in production and supply'.

The sectors affected, whose assets were now declared 'the property of the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, were the mining, metallurgical, textile, electrical, timber, tobacco, resin, glass and pottery, leather and cement industries, all steam driven mills, local utilities and private railways, together with a few other minor industries. The task of 'organising the administration of nationalised enterprises' was entrusted 'as a matter of urgency' to Vesenka and its sections. But until Vesenka issued specific instructions regarding individual enterprises covered by the decree 'such enterprises would be regarded as leased rent-free to their former owners, who would continue to finance them and to draw revenue from them'. (65)

(65) ibid., II, p. 105.

The legal transfer of individual enterprises to the state was easily transacted. The assumption of managerial functions by appointees was to take a little longer but this process was also to be completed within a few months. Both steps had been accelerated under the threat of foreign intervention. The change in the *property relations* had been deep-going. *In this sense* a profound revolution had taken place. 'As the Revolution had unleashed Civil War, so Civil War was to intensify the Revolution'. (66) But as far as any fundamental changes in the relations of production were concerned, the Revolution was already spent. The period of 'war communism'—now starting—was to see the working class lose what little power it had enjoyed *in production,* during the last few weeks of 1917 and the first few weeks of 1918.

(66) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 92.

July 4–10

Fifth All Russian Congress of Soviets.

Throughout the first half of 1918 the issue of 'nationalisation' had been the subject of bitter controversy between

the 'left' communists and the Leninists. Lenin had been opposed to the total nationalisation of the means of production, immediately after October. This was not because of any wish to do a political deal with the bourgeoisie, but because of his underestimation of the technological and administrative maturity of the proletariat, a maturity that would have been put to an immediate test had all major industry been formally nationalised. The result had been an extremely complex situation in which some industries had been nationalised 'from above', (i.e. by decree of the Central Government), others 'from below' (i.e. where workers had taken over enterprises abandoned by their former owners), while in yet other places the former owners were still in charge of their factories—although restricted in their freedom of action or authority by the encroachment of the Factory Committees.

Kritzman, one of the ablest theoreticians of 'left' communism had criticised this state of affairs from an early date. He had referred to the 'Workers Control' decree of November 14, 1917 as 'half-measures, therefore unrealisable'. 'As a slogan workers' control implied the growing, but as yet insufficient power of the proletariat. It was the implied expression of a weakness, still to be overcome, of the working class movement. Employers would not be inclined to run their businesses with the sole aim of teaching the workers how to manage them. Conversely the workers felt only hatred for the capitalists and saw no reason why they should voluntarily remain exploited'. (67)

Osinsky, another 'left' communist, stressed another aspect. 'The fate of the workers' control slogan', he wrote 'is most interesting. Born of the wish to unmask the opponent, it failed when it sought to convert itself into a system. Where, despite everything it fulfilled itself, its content altered completely from what we had originally envisaged. It took the form of a decentralised dictatorship, of the subordination of capitalists, taken individually, to various working class organisations acting independently of one another . . . Workers' Control had originally been aimed at subordinating the owners of the means of production. . . But this coexistence soon became intolerable. The state of dual power between managers and workers soon led to the collapse of the enterprise. Or it rapidly became transformed into the total power of the workers, without the least authorisation of the central powers'. (68)

Much 'left' communist writing at this time stressed the theme that early nationalisation of the means of production would have avoided many of these ambiguities. Total expropriation of the capitalists would have allowed one to proceed immediately from 'workers' control' to 'workers' management' through the medium of some central organism regulating the whole of the socialised economy. It is interesting that Lozovsky,

(67) I. Larine and L. Kritzman, *Wirtschaftsleben und Wirtschaftlicher Aufbau in Soviet Russland*, 1917-1920. Hamburg, 1921, p. 163. (In German.)

(68) N. Osinsky. *'O stroitelstve sotsialisma'* ('The building of Socialism') Moscow 1918, p. 35 et seq.

although at the time strongly opposed to the viewpoint of the 'left' communists (because he felt that the revolution had only been a 'bourgeois democratic' revolution) was later to write: 'It was soon to be proved that in the era of social revolution, a constitutional monarchy in each enterprise (i.e. the previous boss, but only exercising limited power. M.B.) was impossible and that the former owner—however complex the structure of a modern enterprise—was a superfluous cog'. (69)

(69) A. Lozovsky *'The Trade Unions in Soviet Russia'*. (All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, Moscow, 1920,) p. 654.

A split occurred a little later among the 'left' communists. Radek reached an agreement with the Leninists. He was prepared to accept 'one-man management' in principle (not too hard a task for a non-proletarian?) because it was now to be applied in the context of the extensive nationalisation decrees of June 1918.
In Radek's opinion these decrees would help ensure the 'proletarian basis of the regime.' Bukharin too broke with Osinsky and rejoined the fold.
Osinsky and his supporters however proceeded to form a new oppositional tendency: the 'democratic centralists' (so-called because of their opposition to the 'bureaucratic centralism' of the Party leadership). They continued to agitate for workers' management of production. Their ideas, and those of the original group of 'left' communists were to play an important role in the development, two years later, of the Workers Opposition.
With the Civil War and War Communism the issues appeared, for a while, to become blurred. There was little production for anyone to control. 'The issues of 1918 however were only postponed. They could not be forgotten thanks to the left communists' work of criticism. As soon as the military respite permitted, left wing oppositionists were ready to raise again the fundamental question of the social nature of the Soviet regime'. (70)

(70) R. V. Daniels. op. cit., p. 91.

August

High point of Volga offensive by the Whites.
The Civil War immensely accelerated the process of economic centralisation . As a knowledge of previous Bolshevik practice might have led one to expect, this was to prove an extremely bureaucratic form of centralisation. The whole Russian economy was 'reorganised' on a semi-military basis. The Civil War tended to transform all major industry into a supply organisation for the Red Army. This made industrial policy a matter of military strategy.
It is worth pointing out, at this stage, that we doubt if there is any *intrinsic* merit in decentralisation, as some anarchists maintain. The Paris Commune, a Congress of Soviets (or a shop stewards' committee or strike committee to take modern analogies) are all highly centralised yet fairly democratic. Feudalism on the other hand was both decentralised and highly bureaucratic. The key

question is whether the 'centralised' apparatus is controlled from below (by elected and revocable delegates) or whether it separates itself from those on whose behalf it is allegedly acting.

This period witnessed a considerable fall in production, due to a complex variety of factors which have been well described elsewhere. (71) The 'trouble' was often blamed by Party spokesmen on the influence of heretical 'anarcho-syndicalist' ideas. Mistakes had certainly been made but what had been the growing pains of a new movement were now being attributed to the inherent vices of any attempt by the workers to dominate production. 'Workers control over industry carried out by the Factory and Plant Committees' wrote one government spokesman 'has shown what can be expected if the plans of the anarchists are realised'. (72) Attempts at control from below were now being systematically suppressed. Proletarian partisans of the individual Factory Committees tried to resist but their resistance was easily overcome. (73) Bitterness and despair developed among sections of the proletariat (and by no means 'backward' sections). Such factors must also be taken into account —but seldom are—in discussing the fall of production, and the widespread resort to 'antisocial activities' so characteristic of the years of 'war communism'.

(71) See for instance I. Deutscher *The Prophet Unarmed*, O.U.P. 1959, pp. 1-14.

(72) I. I. Stepanov-Skortsov, op. cit., p. 24.

(73) M. Dobb. *Soviet Economic Development since* 1917, New York, 1948, pp. 89-90.

August 25–September 1

First All-Russian Conference of Anarcho-syndicalists meets in Moscow. The industrial resolution 'accused the government of betraying the working class with its suppression of workers' control in favour of such capitalist devices as one-man management, labour discipline and the employment of 'bourgeois' engineers and technicians. By forsaking the Factory Committees —"the beloved child of the great workers' revolution" —for those "dead organisations", the trade unions, and by substituting decrees and red tape for industrial democracy, the Bolshevik leadership was creating a monster of "state capitalism", a bureaucratic Behemoth, which it ludicrously called socialism'. (74)

(74) P. Avrich. op. cit., p. 191.

'Volny Golos Truda' (The Free Voice of Labour) was established as the successor to *Golos Truda* (closed down in May 1918). The new paper was itself closed down after its fourth issue (September 16, 1918). This had contained an interesting article by 'M. Sergven' (?Maximov) called *'Paths of Revolution'*. The article 'made a remarkable departure from the usual condemnation of the Bolsheviks as 'Betrayers of the Working Class'. Lenin and his followers were not necessarily cold-blooded cynics who, with Machiavellian cunning, had mapped out the new class structure in advance to satisfy their personal lust for power. Quite possibly they were motivated by a genuine concern for human suffering. . . But the division of society into administrators and workers followed inexorably from the centralisation of authority. It could not be otherwise. . .

Once the functions of management and labour had become separated (the former assigned to a minority of "experts" and the latter to the untutored masses) all possibility of dignity or equality were destroyed'. (75) In the same issue Maximov slammed the 'Manilovs' (76) in the anarchist camp as 'romantic visionaries who pined for pastoral utopias, oblivious of the complex forces at work in the modern world. It was time to stop dreaming of the Golden Age. It was time to 'organise and act'. For these principled yet realistic views Maximov and the anarcho-syndicalists were to be viciously attacked as 'anarcho-bureaucratic Judases by other tendencies in the anarchist movement'. (77)

(75) ibid., pp. 192-3.

(76) Manilov was a day-dreaming landowner in Gogol's *Dead Souls*.

(77) P. Avrich. op. cit., pp. 196-197.

August 1918

A government decree fixes the composition of the Vesenka to 30 members nominated by the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, 20 nominated by the Regional Councils of National Economy (Sovnarkhozy) and 10 nominated by the All-Russian Central Executive of the Soviets (V.Ts.I.K.). Current Vesenka business was to be entrusted to a Presidium of 9 other members, of whom the President and his Deputy were nominated by the Council of Peoples Commissars (Sovnarkom) and the others by the V.Ts.I.K. The Presidium was officially supposed to implement the policies decided at the monthly meetings of all 69 of the Vesenka's members. But it soon came to undertake more and more of the work. After the autumn of 1918 full meetings of the Vesenka were no longer held. It had become a department of state. (78)

(78) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, 180-181.

In other words within a year of the capture of state power by the Bolsheviks, the relations of production (shaken for a while at the height of the mass movement) had reverted to the classical authoritarian pattern seen in all class societies. The workers *as workers* had been divested of any meaningful decisional authority in the matters that concerned them most.

September 28

The Bolshevik trade union leader Tomsky declares at the *First All-Russian Congress of Communist Railwaymen* that 'it was the task of the Communists firstly to create well-knit trade unions in their own industries, secondly to take possession of these organisations by tenacious work, thirdly to stand at the head of these organisations, fourthly to expel all non-proletarian organisations and fifthly to take the union under our own communist influence'. (79)

(79) Vserossiiskaya konferentsiya zheleznodorozhnikov kommunistov (First All-Russian Conference of Communist Railwaymen), Moscow 1919, p. 72.

October

Government Decree reiterates the ruling that no body other than Vesenka 'in its capacity as the central organ regulating and organising the whole production of the Republic' has the right to sequester industrial enterprises. (80) The need to publish such a decree suggests that local soviets, or perhaps even local Sovnarkhozy were doing just that.

(80) Sbornik dekretov i postanovlenii po narodnomu khozyaistvu (1920), ii, 83.

November 6–9
Sixth All-Russian Congress of Soviets.
November 25–December 1
Second All-Russian Conference of Anarcho-syndicalists meets in Moscow.
December
A new decree abolished the regional Sovnarkhozy and recognised the provincial Sovnarkhozy as 'executive organs of Vesenka'. The local Sovnarkhozy were to become 'economic sections' of the executive committees of the corresponding local soviets. The 'glavki' were to have their own subordinate organs at provincial headquarters. 'This clearly represented a further step towards the centralised control of every branch of industry all over the country by its glavk or centre in Moscow, under the supreme authority of Vesenka'. (81)

(81) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, 183.

December
Second All-Russian Congress of Regional Economic Councils.
Molotov analysed the membership of the 20 most important 'glavki' and 'centres'. Of 400 persons concerned, over 10% were former employers or employers' representatives, 9% technicians, 38% officials from various departments (including Vesenka) . . . and the remaining 43% workers or representatives of workers' organisations, including trade unions. The management of production was predominantly in the hands of persons 'having no relation to the proletarian elements in industry'. The 'glavki' had to be regarded as 'organs in no way corresponding to the proletarian dictatorship'. Those who *directed* policy were 'employers' representatives, technicians and specialists'. (82) 'It was indisputable that the soviet bureaucrat of these early years was as a rule a former member of the bourgeois intelligentsia or official class, and brought with him many of the traditions of the old Russian bureaucracy'. (83)

(82) Trudy vtorogo vserossiiskogo s'yezda sovetov narodnogo khosyaistva (n.d.), (Second All-Russian Congress of Regional Economic Councils), p. 213.

(83) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, 190.

1919

January 16–25

Second All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions

Throughout 1918 the trade unions had played an important role in industrial administration. This had vastly increased when the government, afraid that privately-owned industry wouldn't work for the needs of the Red Army, speeded up the nationalisation programme, 'at first as a matter of military rather than of economic policy'. (1) What Lenin called the 'state functions' of the unions had increased rapidly. Party members in the trade union leadership (such as Tomsky, Chairman of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions) enjoyed considerable power.

The relation between the union leaderships and the rank and file were far from democratic however. 'In practice the more the trade unions assumed the administrative functions of a conventional managerial bureaucracy, the more bureaucratic they themselves became'. (2) A Congress delegate, Chirkin, claimed for instance that 'although in most regions there were institutions representing the trade union movement, these institutions were not elected or ratified in any way; where elections had been conducted and individuals elected who were not suitable to the needs of the Central Council or local powers, the elections had been annulled very freely and the individuals replaced by others more subservient to the administration'. (3) Another delegate, Perkin, spoke out against new regulations which required that representatives sent by workers' organisations to the Commissariat of Labour be ratified by the Commissariat. 'If at a union meeting we elect a person as a commissar—i.e. if the working class is allowed in a given case to express its will—one would think that this individual would be allowed to represent our interests in the Commissariat, would be our commissar. But, no. In spite of the fact that we have expressed our will—the will of the working class—it is still necessary for the commissar we have elected to be confirmed by the authorities. . . The proletariat is allowed the right to

(1) I. Deutscher. op. cit., p. 25

(2) Waldemar Koch. *Die Bolshevistischen Gewerkshaften*, Jena 1932, pp. 81-82.

(3) Vtoroi vserossiiski s'yezd professionalnykh soyuzov: stenograficheski otchet (Second All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions: stenographic report), Moscow, Central Trade Union Press, 1919, I, 34. (Henceforth referred to as Second Trade Union Congress).

make a fool of itself. It is allowed to elect representatives but the state power, through its right to ratify the elections or not, treats our representatives as it pleases'. (4)

(4) ibid., p. 103.

The unions—and all other bodies for that matter—were increasingly coming under the control of the state, itself already in the exclusive hands of the Party and its nominees. But although there had already been a very definite shift of power in the direction of the emerging bureaucracy, working class organisation and consciousness were still strong enough to exact at least verbal concessions from Party and union leaders. The autonomous Factory Committees had by now been completely smashed but the workers were still fighting a rearguard action in the unions themselves. They were seeking to preserve a few residual shreds of their erstwhile power.

The Second Trade Union Congress 'sanctioned the arrangements under which the unions had become at once military recruiting agents, supply services, punitive organs and so on'. (5) Tomsky for instance pointed out 'that at a time when the trade unions determined wages and conditions of work, strikes could no longer be tolerated. It was necessary to put dots on the i's.' Lenin spoke about the 'inevitable statification of the trade unions'. (The pill was coated with talk about the function of the unions being to educate the workers in the art of administration and about the eventual 'withering away' of the state.) Lozovsky, who had left the Party, spoke as an independent internationalist against Bolshevik policy in the unions.

(5) I. Deutscher. op. cit., p. 26.

A resolution was passed demanding that 'official status be granted to the administrative prerogatives of the unions'. It spoke of 'statisation' (ogosudarstvlenie) of the trade unions, 'as their function broadened and merged with the governmental machinery of industrial administration and control'. (6) The Commissar for Labour, V. V. Shmidt, accepted that 'even the organs of the Commissariat of Labour should be built out of the trade union apparatus'. (7) (At this stage the membership of the unions stood at 3,500,000. It had been 2,600,000 at the time of the First Trade Union Congress, in January 1918, and 1,500,000 at the July Conference of 1917.) (8)

(6) Second Trade Union Congress I, 97

(7) ibid., p. 99.

(8) Zinoviev. *Desyaty s'yezd RKP (b): Protokoly* (The Tenth Congress of the RCP (b): Protocols). Moscow, IMEL, 1933. (Henceforth referred to as Tenth Party Congress.) p. 188.

The Second Congress finally set up an Executive vested with supreme authority between Congresses. The decrees of this Executive were declared 'compulsory for all the unions within its jurisdiction *and for each member of those unions*'. 'The violation of the decrees and insubordination to them on the part of individual unions will lead to their expulsion from the family of proletarian unions'. (9) This would of course place the union outside the only legal framework in which the Bolshevik regime would permit unions to exist at all.

(9) Second Trade Union Congress I, 127

March 2–7
First Congress of Comintern (Third International).
March 18–23
Eighth Party Congress.
The Ukraine and Volga regions had now been reoccupied by the Red Army. A short period of relative stability followed. Later in the year, the advances of Denikin and Yudenich were to threaten Moscow and Petrograd respectively.
A wave of left criticism surged up at the Eighth Congress against the ultra centralist trends. A new Party programme was discussed and accepted. Point 5 of the 'Economic Section' stated that 'the organisational apparatus of socialised industry must be based primarily on the trade unions... Participating already in accordance with the laws of the Soviet Republic and established practice in all local and central organs of industrial administration, the trade unions must proceed to the actual concentration *in their own hands* (my emphasis) of all the administration of the entire economy, as a single economic unit... The participation of the trade unions in economic management and their drawing the broad masses into this work constitutes also the chief method of struggle against the bureaucratisation of the economic apparatus.' (10)
This famous paragraph was to give rise to heated controversies in the years to come. The conservatives in the Party felt it was going too far. Ryazanov warned the Congress that 'we will not avoid bureaucratisation until *all* trade unions . . . relinquish *every* right in the administration of production'. (11) On the other hand those Bolsheviks who had voted for the incorporation of the Factory Committees into the structure of the unions—and belatedly seen the error of their ways—were to hang on to this clause as to a last bastion, seeking to defend it against the all-pervasive encroachments of the Party bureaucracy. Deutscher (12) describes the famous 'Point 5' as a 'syndicalist slip committed by the Bolshevik leadership in a mood of genuine gratitude to the trade unions for the work performed by them in the Civil War'. He describes how Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders 'would soon have to do a lot of explaining away in order to invalidate this promissory note which the Party had so solemnly and authoritatively handed to the trade unions'. The interpretation is questionable. Lenin was not in the habit of making 'slips' (syndicalist or otherwise) or of being influenced by such considerations as 'gratitude'. It is more probable that the relation of forces, revealed at the Congress—itself only a pale reflection of working class attitudes outside the Party—compelled the Bolshevik leadership to beat a verbal retreat. The clause was anyway surrounded by a number of others, partly invalidating it.
The programme proclaimed that 'the socialist method

(10) *Vosmoi s'yezd RKP (b)*: *Protokoly* (The Eighth Congress of the RCP (b): Protocols). Moscow, IMEL, 1933. (Henceforth referred to as Eighth Party Congress.) Resolutions, I, 422.

(11) ibid., p. 72.

(12) I. Deutscher. op. cit., p. 29.

of production could only be made secure on the basis of the comradely discipline of the workers'. It assigned to the trade unions 'the chief role in creating this new socialist discipline'. Point 8 'urged the unions to impress upon the workers the need to work with and learn from the bourgeois technicians and specialists—and to overcome their "ultra-radical" distrust of the latter . . . The workers could not build socialism without a period of apprenticeship to the bourgeois intelligentsia . . . Payment of high salaries and premiums to bourgeois specialists was therefore sanctioned. It was the ransom which the young proletarian State had to pay the bourgeois-bred technicians and scientists for services with which it could not dispense'. (13)

(13) ibid., p. 31.

We cannot here become involved in a full discussion on the role of 'specialists' after the revolution. The problem is not an exclusively Russian one, although the specific conditions of Russian development doubtless resulted in a particularly marked divorce between technicians and industrial workers. Specialised knowledge of a technical nature will clearly be required by the Workers' Councils but there is no reason why those who now possess it should all find themselves on the side of the bourgeoisie. This knowledge does not of itself however, entitle anyone either to impose decisions or to enjoy material benefits.

These problems have been exhaustively discussed in a number of publications—but nearly always in terms of either crude expediency or of immutable 'basic principles'. The theoretical implications have only recently been explored. According to Limon (14) management is partly a technical question. But the historical circumstances in which the working class will be compelled to undertake it will make it appear to them as primarily a political and social task. At the everyday, down-to-earth and *human* level the workers, at the time of the socialist revolution, will almost inevitably see the technicians and specialists not as human beings (who also happen to have technological know-how) but exclusively as the agents of the exploitation of man by man.

(14) D. L. Limon. op. cit., p. 79.

The capitalist world is one of fetishism, where *interpersonal* relationships tend to disappear behind relationships between *things*. But the very moment when the masses revolt against this state of affairs, they break through this smoke screen. They see through the taboo of 'things' and come to grips with *people*, whom they had 'respected' until then in the name of the all-holy fetish known as private property. From that moment on the specialist, manager or capitalist, whatever his technical or personal relationship to the enterprise, appears to the workers as the incarnation of exploitation, as the enemy, as the one with whom the only thing they want to do is to get him out of their lives. To ask the workers, *at this stage*, to have a more 'balanced' attitude, to

recognise in the old boss the new 'technical director', the 'indispensable specialist' is tantamount to asking the workers, at the very moment when they are becoming aware of their historical role and of their social power, at the very moment when at last confident in themselves they are asserting their autonomy—to confess their incompetence, their weakness, their insufficiency—and this in the area where they are most sensitive, the field encompassing their daily lives from childhood on—the field of production.

The bureaucratisation of the Party itself provoked pointed comments at the Congress. Osinsky declared: 'It is necessary to enrol workers into the Central Committee on a broad scale; it is necessary to introduce there a sufficient quantity of workers in order to proletarianise the Central Committee'. (15) [Lenin was to come to the same conclusion in 1923, at the time of the so-called Lenin Levy!] Osinsky proposed that the Central Committee be expanded from 15 to 21 members. It was extremely naive, however, to expect that this introduction of proletarians into the higher echelons of the administrative machine could somewhat compensate for the fact that the working class had by now almost totally lost the power it had briefly held *at the point of production.*

(15) Osinsky, Eighth Party Congress, pp. 30, 168.

The decline in the Soviets was also discussed at the Congress. The Soviets were no longer playing any active role in relation to production—and very little role in other matters either. More and more of the decisions were being taken by the Party members serving in the 'Soviet apparatus'. The Soviets had become mere organs of ratification (rubber stamps). The theses of Sapronov and Osinsky—according to which the Party should not seek to 'impose its will on the Soviets'—were decisively rejected.

The Party leaders made minor concessions on all of these issues. But the process of tightening up control, both in the Party and in the economy as a whole, continued at an unrelenting pace. The Eighth Congress established the Politbureau, the Orgbureau and the Secretariat, technically only sub-committees of the Central Committee, but soon to assume tremendous power. The concentration of decision-making authority had taken a big step forward. 'Party discipline' was strengthened. The Congress ruled that each decision must above all be fulfilled. Only after this is an appeal to the corresponding Party organ permissible.* '. . . The

* *A pathetic echo, nearly fifty years later, is to be found in the 'Perspectives for I.S.', submitted in September* 1968 *by the Political Committee of* International Socialism. *Point* 4 *ran*: *'Branches must accept directives from the Centre, unless they fundamentally disagree with them, in which case they should try to accord with them, while demanding an open debate on the matter'.*

whole matter of posting of Party workers is in the hands of the Central Committee. Its decisions are binding for everyone'. (16) The era of political postings—as a means of silencing embarrassing criticism—had begun in earnest.

(16) Eighth Party Congress. Resolutions, I, 444.

April

High Point of Kolchak's offensive in Urals.

June

Decree introducing 'labour books' for workers in Moscow and Petrograd.

October

High point of Denikin's offensive in South Russia. Yudenich's drive on Petrograd.

December 2–4

Eighth Party Conference.

The Eighth Conference worked out a statute which rigidly defined the rights and duties of Party cells (fractions or fraktsya) and elaborated a scheme calculated to secure for the Party a leading role in every organisation. 'The Communist trade unionist was to be a Communist first and only then a trade unionist, and by his disciplined behaviour he enabled the Party to lead the trade unions.' (17) As the Party degenerated this 'leadership' was to play an increasingly pernicious role.

(17) I. Deutscher. op. cit., p. 33.

December 5–9

Seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets. (There had been two such Congresses in 1917 and four in 1918). Resolution passed in favour of collective management of industry. (18) At the congress, Sapronov attacked the unpopular 'glavki', arguing that they represented an attempt to substitute 'organisation by departments for organisation by soviets, the bureaucratic for the democratic system.' Another speaker declared that if people were asked 'what should be destroyed on the day after the destruction of Denikin and Kolchak, 90% would reply: the glavki and the centres'. (19)

(18) Preobrazhensky. *Devyaty s'yezd RKP (b): Protokoly.* (The Ninth Congress of the RCP (b): Protocols) Moscow, IMEL, 1934. (Henceforth referred to as Ninth Party Congress.) p. 72

(19) E. H. Carr. op. cit., p. 184.

December 16

Trotsky submits to Central Committee of the Party his *'Theses on the transition from war to peace'* (dealing in particular with the *'militarisation of labour'*), intending them, for the time being, to go no further. (20) The most fundamental decisions, affecting the material conditions of life of millions of ordinary Russian workers, had first to be discussed and decided behind closed doors, by the Party leaders. The following day, *Pravda,* under the editorship of Bukharin, published Trotsky's theses 'by mistake' (in reality as part of a campaign to discredit Trotsky). For those who can see deeper than the surface of things, the whole episode was highly symptomatic of the tensions within the Party at the time.

(20) I. Deutscher. *'The Prophet Armed'*, p. 487.

At this stage Lenin whole-heartedly supported Trotsky's proposals. (A whole mythology was later to be built up by Trotskyists and others to the effect that 'Trotsky may have been wrong on the militarisation of labour'

but that Lenin was always opposed to it. This is untrue. *Lenin was only to oppose Trotsky on this question twelve months later, at the end of* 1920, as will be described shortly.)

Trotsky's proposals let loose 'an avalanche of protests'. (21) He was shouted down at Conferences of Party members, administrators and trade unionists. (22)

A comment is perhaps called for at this stage concerning the attitude of revolutionaries towards 'drastic measures' needed for the salvation of the Revolution. Throughout history the masses have always been prepared to make enormous sacrifices whenever they felt really fundamental issues were at stake. The real problem is not, however, to discuss whether this or that suggestion was 'too drastic' or not. The problem is to know from whom the decision emanated. Was it taken by institutions controlled from below? Or was it taken by some self-appointed and self-perpetuating organism divorced from the masses? Party members opposing the measures being proposed at this stage were caught in an insoluble contradiction. They denounced the *policies* of the Party leaders without really understanding the extent to which their own organisational conceptions had contributed to what was happening to the Revolution. Only some members of the Workers Opposition of 1921 (to a slight degree) and Myasnikov's Workers Group of 1922 (to a greater extent) began to sense the new reality.

December 27

With Lenin's approval the government sets up the Commission on Labour Duty, with Trotsky (still Commissar for War) as its President.

(21) ibid., p. 492.
(22) ibid., p. 492.

1920

January

Collapse of Whites in Siberia. Blockade lifted by Great Britain, France and Italy.

Decree issued by Sovnarkom laid down general regulations for universal labour service 'to supply industry, agriculture, transport and other branches of the national economy with labour power on the basis of a general economic plan'. Anyone could be called up on a single occasion or periodically for various forms of work (agriculture, building, road-making, food or fuel supplies, snow clearance, carting and 'measures to deal with the consequences of public calamities'). In an amazing aside the document stated that there was even cause to 'regret the destruction of the old police apparatus which had known how to register citizens, not only in towns but also in the country'. (1)

January 12

Meeting of All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions.

At the gathering of the Bolshevik fraction Lenin and Trotsky *together* urge acceptance of the militarisation of labour. Only 2 of the 60 or more Bolshevik trade union leaders support them. 'Never before had Trotsky or Lenin met with so striking a rebuff'. (2)

January 10–21

Third Congress of Economic Councils.

In a speech to the Congress Lenin declares 'the collegial principle (collective management) . . . represents something rudimentary, necessary for the first stage, when it is necessary to build anew . . . The transition to practical work is connected with individual authority. This is the system which more than any other assures the best utilisation of human resources'. (3)

Despite this exhortation, opposition to Lenin and Trotsky's views was steadily gaining ground. The Congress adopted a resolution *in favour* of collective management of production.

February

Regional Party Conferences in Moscow and Kharkov

(1) *Sobraniye Uzakonenii*, 1920, No. 8, Art. 49. Also *Treti vserossiiski s'yezd professionalnykh soyuzov* (Third All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions), 1920, I, Plenumi, pp. 50-51. (Henceforth referred to as Third Trade Union Congress).

(2) ibid., p. 493.

(3) V. I. Lenin, Speech to Third Congress of Economic Councils, Sochineniya XXV, p. 17.

come out against 'one-man management'. So did the Bolshevik faction of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions at its meetings in January and March. (4) Tomsky, a well-known trade union leader and a member of the ARCCTU presented 'Theses' ('On the Tasks of the Trade Unions') which were accepted despite their implicit criticism of Lenin's and Trotsky's views.

(4) E. H. Carr. op. cit., II, 193.

Tomsky's theses claimed that 'the fundamental principle guiding the work of various bodies leading and administering the economy remains the principle now in existence; collective management. This must be applied from the Presidium of the Vesenka right down to the management of the factories. Collective management alone can guarantee the participation of the broad non-party masses, through the medium of the unions'. The matter was still seen however as one of expediency rather than basic principle. 'The trade unions' Tomsky claimed 'are the most competent and interested organisations in the matter of restoring the country's production and its correct functioning'. (5)

(5) Tomsky. Ninth Party Congress *'Zadachi prosoyuzov'* (The tasks of the Trade Unions). Appendix 13, p. 534.

The adoption of Tomsky's theses by a substantial majority marked the high point of opposition, within the Party, to Lenin's views. Resolutions however were unlikely to resolve the differences. Both sides realised this. A more serious threat to the Party leadership came from the efforts of Party dissidents in industry to establish an independent centre, from which to control the Party organisations in the trade unions. Friction had developed between the Party and trade union authorities over assignments of Party members to trade union work. The Party fraction in the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, dominated by 'lefts', 'was claiming direct authority over the Party members in the various industrial unions. Shortly before the 9th Congress the Party fraction in the ARCCTU passed a resolution which would confirm this claim, by making all Party fractions in the unions directly subordinate to the Party fraction in the ARCCTU, rather than to the geographical organisations of the Party. This literally would have created a Party within the Party, a semi-autonomous body embracing a substantial proportion of the Party's membership. . . The mere existence of such an inner sub-party would be contrary to centralist principles, to say nothing of the prospect of its domination by leftist opponents of Lenin's leadership . . . It was inevitable that the unionists' demand for autonomy within the Party would be rejected and when the resolution was submitted to the Orgbureau this is precisely what happened'. (6)

(6) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 126.

The whole episode had interesting repercussions. Confronted with a conflict between democracy and centralism, the 'democratic centralists' proved that on this issue—as on so many others—centralist considerations were paramount. They proposed a resolution, passed by the Moscow organisation of the Party, to the effect

that 'Party discipline in every case takes precedence over trade union discipline'. (7) On the other hand the Southern Bureau of the ARCCTU passed a resolution on autonomy for Party trade unionists similar to that drawn up by the parent organisation—*and got it passed by the 4th Ukrainian Party Conference.*

(7) Ninth Party Congress. Theses of the Moscow Provincial Committee of the R.C.P. Appendix 15, p. 542.

March

Second All-Russian Congress of Food Industry Workers (under syndicalist influence) meets in Moscow.

Censures Bolshevik regime for inaugurating 'unlimited and uncontrolled dominion over the proletariat and peasantry, frightful centralism carried to the point of absurdity . . . destroying in the country all that is alive, spontaneous and free'. 'The so-called dictatorship of the proletariat is in reality the dictatorship over the proletariat by the Party and even by individual persons'. (8)

(8) Vmesto programmy: rezolyutsii I i II vserossiiskikh konferentsii anarkho-sindikalistov (Berlin, 1922), p. 28.

March 29–April 4

Ninth Party Congress.

The Civil War had by now almost been won. The people were yearning to taste, at last, the fruits of their revolution. But the Congress foreshadowed the continuation and extension into peace time of some of the methods of war communism (conscription of manpower, compulsory direction of labour, strict rationing of consumer goods, payment of wages in kind, requisition of agricultural produce from the peasants—in the place of taxation). The most controversial issues discussed were the 'militarisation of labour' and 'one-man management' of industry. The proposals put to the Congress may be taken as representing the views of Lenin and Trotsky concerning the period of industrial reconstruction.

On the question of direction of labour, Trotsky's views were heavily influenced by his experiences as Commissar for War. Battalions awaiting demobilisation had been used on a wide scale for forestry and other work. According to Deutscher 'it was only a step from the employment of armed forces as labour battalions to the organisation of civilian labour into military units'. (9) 'The working class' Trotsky announced to the Congress 'cannot be left wandering all over Russia. They must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded, just like soldiers'. 'Compulsion of labour will reach the highest degree of intensity during the transition from capitalism to socialism'. 'Deserters from labour ought to be formed into punitive battalions or put into concentration camps'. He advocated 'incentive wages for efficient workers', 'socialist emulation' and spoke of the 'need to adopt the progressive essence of Taylorism'. (10)

(9) I. Deutscher. *Soviet Trade Unions*, p. 36.

(10) L. Trotsky. *Sochineniya* (Works), vol. XV, p. 126.

In relation to industrial management Lenin and Trotsky's main preoccupations were with 'economic efficiency'. Like the bourgeoisie (both before and after them) they identified 'efficiency' with individual management. They realised however that this would be a bitter pill for the workers to swallow. They had to tread care-

fully.

'Individual management' the official resolution delicately proclaimed 'does not in any degree limit or infringe upon the rights of the working class or the "rights" of the trade unions, because the class can exercise its rule in one form or another, as technical expediency may dictate. It is the ruling class at large (again identified with the Party—MB.) which in every case "appoints" persons for managerial and administrative jobs'. (11) Their caution was justified. The workers had not forgotten how at the First Trade Union Congress (January 1918) a resolution had proclaimed that 'it was the task of workers' control to put an end to autocracy in the economic field, just as an end had been put to it in the political field'. (12)

Various patterns of industrial management were soon outlined. (13) In drawing these up it is doubtful whether Lenin and Trotsky were encumbered by any doctrinal considerations such as those of Kritzman, the theoretician of 'left' communism, who had defined collective management as 'the specific, distinctive mark of the proletariat . . . distinguishing it from all other social classes . . . the most democratic principle of organisation'. (14) Insofar as he had any principled view on the matter Trotsky was to declare that collective management was a 'Menshevik idea'.

At the 9th Congress Lenin and Trotsky were opposed most vehemently by the Democratic Centralists (Osinsky, Sapronov, Preobrazhensky). Smirnov, obviously ahead of his time, enquired why if one-man management was such a good idea it wasn't being practiced in the Sovnarkom (Council of Peoples Commissars). Lutovinov, the metalworkers' leader, who was to play an important role in the development of the Workers Opposition later that year, asserted that 'the responsible head of each branch of industry can only be the production union. And of industry as a whole it can only be the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions—it cannot be otherwise'. (15) Shlyapnikov called explicitly for a three-way 'separation of powers' between Party, soviets and the trade unions. (16) Speaking for the Democratic Centralists, Osinsky endorsed Shlyapnikov's idea. He observed a 'clash of several cultures' (the 'military-soviet' culture, the 'civil-soviet' culture and the trade union movement which had 'created its own sphere of culture'). It was improper to apply to all of the cultures certain particular methods (such as militarisation) which were appropriate to only one of them. (17) This was a clear case of being caught in a trap of one's own making.

On the question of 'one-man management' the Democratic-Centralists also had a position which was beside the real point. A resolution, which they had voted through the earlier Moscow Provincial Party Conference minimised the matter. 'The question of the collegial

(11) Ninth Party Congress, p. 128

(12) First Trade Union Congress p. 269-72.

(13) I. Deutscher, op. cit. p. 35.

(14) L. Kritzman *Geroicheski period russkoi revolyutsii* (The Heroic Period of the Russian Revolution), Moscow and Leningrad, 1926, p. 83.

(15) Ninth Party Congress, pp. 254-55.

(16) ibid., p. 564, n32.

(17) ibid., pp. 123-4.

system (collective management) and individual authority is not a question of principle, but a practical one. It must be decided in each case according to the circumstances'. (18) While correctly grasping that collective management had *of itself* no implicit virtues they failed to recognise that the real problem was that of the relation between management (individual or collective) and those it managed. The real problem was *from whom* the 'one' or the 'several' managers would derive their authority.

(18) ibid., p. 571, n75.

Lenin was not prepared for any concessions on the matter of trade union autonomy. 'The Russian Communist Party can in no case agree that political leadership alone should belong to the Party and economic leadership to the trade unions'. (19) Krestinsky had denounced Lutovinov's ideas as 'syndicalist contraband'. (20) At Lenin's instigation the Congress called on the unions 'to explain to the broad circles of the working class that industrial reconstruction can only be achieved by a transition to the maximum curtailment of collective administration and by the gradual introduction of individual management in units directly engaged in production'. (21) One-man management was to apply to all institutions from State Trusts to individual factories. 'The elective principle must now be replaced by the principle of selection'. (22) Collective management was 'utopian', 'impractical' and 'injurious'. (23) The Congress also called for a struggle 'against the ignorant conceit of . . . demagogic elements . . .who think that the working class can solve its problems without having recourse to bourgeois specialists in the most responsible posts'. 'There could be no place in the ranks of the Party of scientific socialism for those demagogic elements which play upon this sort of prejudice among the backward sections of the workers'. (24)

(19) ibid., 'To the organisations of the R.C.P. (b) on the question of the agenda of the Party Congress'. Appendix 2, p. 474.

(20) *Pravda*, March 12, 1920.

(21) Ninth Party Congress. *Po voprosu o professionalnykh soyuzokh i ikh organizatsii* (On the question of the trade unions and their organisation) Resolutions: I, 493.

(22) ibid., 'The Trade Unions and Their Tasks' (Lenin's theses). Appendix 12, p. 532.

(23) ibid., pp. 26, 28.

The Ninth Congress specifically decreed that 'no trade union group should directly intervene in industrial management' and that 'Factory Committees should devote themselves to the questions of labour discipline, of propaganda and of education of the workers'. (25)

(24) ibid.

To avoid any recurrence of 'independent' tendencies among the leaders of the trade unions those well-known proletarians Bukharin and Radek were moved onto the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions to represent the Party leadership and keep a watchful eye on the ARCCTU's proceedings. (26)

(25) At the Eleventh Congress, in 1922, Lenin was to say 'It is absolutely essential that all authority in the factories should be concentrated in the hands of management. . . Under these circumstances *any* direct intervention by the trade unions in the management of enterprises must be regarded as positively harmful and impermissible.' (Resolutions I, 607, 610-612).

(26) V. I. Lenin. Ninth Party Congress, p. 96.

All this of course was in flagrant contradiction with the spirit of the decisions taken a year earlier, at the Eighth Party Congress, and in particular to the famous Point 5 of the Economic Section of the 1919 Party Programme. It illustrates quite clearly how vulnerable the working class was to become, once it had been forced to relinquish its *real* power, the power it had once held in production, in exchange for a shadowy substitute—political power represented by the power of 'its' Party. The

policy advocated by Lenin was vigorously to be followed. In late 1920, of 2051 important enterprises for which data were available, 1783 were already under 'one-man management'. (27)

(27) L. Kritzman, op. cit., p. 83.

The Ninth Party Congress also saw changes relating to the internal Party regime. The Congress had opened to a storm of protests concerning this matter. Local Party Committees (at least democratic in form) were being made subservient to bureaucratically constituted local 'political departments'. 'With the institution of such bodies all political activity in the plant, industry, organisation or locality under their jurisdiction was placed under rigid control from above. . . This innovation . . . taken from the Army . . . was designed to transmit propaganda downward rather than opinion upward'. (28) Verbal concessions were again made—amid repeated pleas for unity. Both at the Congress and later in the year 'the dissidents made the mistake of concentrating on attempts to rearrange top political institutions, to reshuffle the forms of political control or to introduce new blood into the leadership—while leaving the real sources of power relatively unaffected . . . Organisation, they naively believed, was the most effective weapon against bureaucracy'. (29)

(28) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 114.

(29) ibid., pp. 115, 117.

The Ninth Congress finally gave the Orgbureau (set up a year earlier and composed of 5 members of the Central Committee) the right to carry out transfers and postings of Party members without reference to the Politbureau. As had happened before—and was to happen again repeatedly—retrogressive changes in industrial policy went hand in hand with retrogressive changes in internal Party structure.

April

Trotsky given Commissariat of Transport as well as his Defence post. 'The Politbureau offered to back him to the hilt in any action he might take, no matter how severe'. (30) Those who peddle the myth of an alleged leninist opposition to Trotsky's methods *at this stage*, please note.

(30) I. Deutscher. *The Prophet Armed*, p. 498.

April 6–15

Third All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions.

Trotsky declared that 'the militarisation of labour . . . is the indispensable basic method for the organisation of our labour forces' . . . 'Is it true that compulsory labour is always unproductive? . . . This is the most wretched and miserable liberal prejudice: chattel slavery too was productive'. . . 'Compulsory slave labour . . . was in its time a progressive phenomenon'. 'Labour . . . obligatory for the whole country, compulsory for every worker, is the basis of socialism'. 'Wages . . . must not be viewed from the angle of securing the personal existence of the individual worker' but should 'measure the conscientiousness, and efficiency of the work of every labourer'. (31) Trotsky stressed that coercion, regimentation and militarisation of labour were no mere

(31) *Treti vserossiiski s'yezd professionalnykh soyuzov: stenograficheski otchet* (Third All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions: stenographic report), Moscow 1920, pp. 87-97. (Henceforth referred to as Third Trade Union Congress.)

emergency measures. The workers' state normally had the right to coerce *any* citizen to perform *any* work, at *any* time of its choosing. (32) With a vengeance, Trotsky's philosophy of labour came to underline Stalin's practical labour policy in the thirties.

(32) I. Deutscher. op. cit., pp. 500-507.

At this Congress Lenin publicly boasted that he had stood for one-man management from the beginning. He claimed that in 1918 he 'pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the purpose of carrying out the Soviet idea' (33) and claimed that at that stage 'there were no disputes in connection with the question (of one-man management).' This last assertion is obviously untrue—even if one's terms of reference are restricted to the ranks of the Party. The files of *Kommunist* are there to prove the point!

(33) *Trade Unions in Soviet Russia* (Labour Research Department and ILP Information Committee), November 1920. British Museum (Press Mark: 0824-bb-41).

June–July

By the middle of 1920 there had been little if any change in the harsh reality of Russian working class life. Years of war, of civil war and of wars of intervention, coupled with devastation, sabotage, drought, famine and the low initial level of the productive forces, made material improvement difficult. But even the vision had now become blurred. In the 'Soviet' Russia of 1920 the industrial workers were 'subjected again to managerial authority, labour discipline, wage incentives, scientific management—to the familiar forms of capitalist industrial organisation with the same bourgeois managers, qualified only by the State's holding the title to the property'. (34)

(34) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 107.

A 'white' professor who reached Omsk in the autumn of 1919 from Moscow reported that 'at the head of many of the centres and glavki sit former employers and responsible officials and managers of business. The unprepared visitor to the centres who is personally acquainted with the former commercial and industrial world would be surprised to see the former owners of big leather factories sitting in Glavkozh, big manufacturers in the Central textile organisations, etc.' (35)

(35) G. K. Gins *Sibir, Soyuzniki, Kolchak* (Peking, 1921) ii, 429.

Under the circumstances it is scarcely surprising that the spurious unity achieved at the Ninth Congress a few months earlier did not last. Throughout the summer and autumn differences of opinion on such issues as bureaucracy within the Party, the relations of the trade unions to the State and even the class nature of the State itself were to take on a very sharp form. Opposition groups appeared at almost every level. In the latter part of the year (after the conclusion of the Russo-Polish war) repressed discontent broke into the open. In the autumn Lenin's authority was to be challenged more seriously than at any time since the 'left' communist movement of early 1918.

July

Publication of Trotsky's classic *'Terrorism and Communism'* (just before the Second Congress of the Com-

munist International). This work gives Trotsky's views on the 'socialist' organisation of labour in their most finished, lucid and unambiguous form. 'The organisation of labour is in its essence the organisation of the new society: every historical form of society is in its foundation a form of organisation of labour'. (36) 'The creation of a socialist society means the organisation of the workers on new foundations, their adaptation to those foundations and their labour re-education, with the one unchanging end of the increase in the productivity of labour'. (37) 'Wages, in the form of both money and goods, must be brought into the closest possible touch with the productivity of individual labour. Under capitalism the system of piecework and of grading, the application of the Taylor system, etc, have as their object to increase the exploitation of the workers by the squeezing out of surplus value. Under socialist production, piecework, bonuses, etc, have as their problem to increase the volume of the social product . . . those workers who do more for the general interest than others receive the right to a greater quantity of the social product than the lazy, the careless and the disorganisers'. (38) 'The very principle of compulsory labour is for the Communist quite unquestionable . . . the only solution to economic difficulties that is correct from the point of view both of principle and of practice is to treat the population of the whole country as the reservoir of the necessary labour power—an almost inexhaustible reservoir—and to introduce strict order into the work of its registration, mobilisation and utilisation'. (39) 'The introduction of compulsory labour service is unthinkable without the application, to a greater or lesser degree, of the methods of militarisation of labour'. (40) 'The unions should discipline the workers and teach them to place the interests of production above their own needs and demands'. 'The young Workers' State requires trade unions not for a struggle for better conditions of labour—that is the task of the social and state organisations as a whole—but to organise the working class for the ends of production'. (41) 'It would be a most crying error to confuse the question as to the supremacy of the proletariat with the question of boards of workers at the head of factories. The dictatorship of the proletariat is expressed in the abolition of private property in the means of production, in the supremacy over the whole soviet mechanism of the collective will of the workers (a euphemism for the Party—M.B.) and not at all in the form in which individual economic enterprises are administered'. (42) 'I consider that if the civil war had not plundered our economic organs of all that was strongest, most independent, most endowed with initiative, we should undoubtedly have entered the path of one-man management in the sphere of economic

(36) L. Trotsky, *'Terrorism and Communism'*. Ann Arbor edition, 1961, p. 133.

(37) ibid., p. 146.

(38) ibid., p. 149.

(39) ibid., p. 135.

(40) ibid., p. 137.

(41) ibid., p. 143.

(42) ibid., p. 162.

administration much sooner and much less painfully'. (43)

(43) ibid., pp. 162-3.

August

Due to the Civil War—and to other factors less often mentioned, such as the attitude of the railway workers to the 'new' regime—the Russian railways had virtually ceased to function. Trotsky, Commissar for Transport, was granted wide emergency powers to try out his theories of 'militarisation of labour'. He started by placing the railwaymen and the personnel of the repair workshops under martial law. When the railwaymen's trade union objected, he summarily ousted its leaders and, *with the full support and endorsement of the Party leadership,* 'appointed others willing to do his bidding. He repeated the procedure in other unions of transport workers'. (44)

(44) I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed,* pp. 501-502.

Early September

Setting up of Tsektran (Central Administrative Body of Railways). Very much Trotsky's brainchild, it was brought into being as a result of a compulsory fusion of the Commissariat of Transport, of the Railway unions and of the Party organs ('political departments') in this field. The entire railroad and water transport systems were to fall within Tsektran's compass. Trotsky was appointed its head. He ruled the Tsektran along strictly military and bureaucratic lines. 'The Politbureau backed him to the hilt, as it had promised'. (45) The railways were got going again. But the cost to the image of the Party was incalculable. Those who wonder why, at a later stage, Trotsky was unable to mobilise mass support for his struggle, within the apparatus, against the 'Stalinist' bureaucracy should meditate on such facts.

(45) ibid., p. 502.

September 22–25

Ninth Party Conference.

Zinoviev gave the official report on behalf of the Central Committee. Sapronov presented a minority report on behalf of the 'Democratic-Centralists' who were well represented. Lutovinov spoke for the recently constituted Workers Opposition. He called for the immediate institution of the widest measures of proletarian democracy, the total rejection of the system whereby appointments from above were made to nominally elected position, and the purging of the Party of careerist elements who were now joining in droves. He also asked that the Central Committee refrain from its constant and exaggerated interventions in the life of the trade unions and of the soviets.

The leadership had to retreat. Zinoviev evaded answering the main complaints. A resolution was passed stressing the need for 'full equality within the Party' and denouncing 'the domination of rank and file members by privileged bureaucrats'. The resolution instructed the Central Committee to proceed by means of 'recommendations' rather than by appointments from above and to abstain from 'disciplinary transfers on political

grounds'. (46)

(46) Isvestiya of the Central Committee. October 12, 1920.

Despite these verbal concessions the leadership, through their spokesman Zinoviev, succeeded in getting the September Conference to accept the setting up of Central and Regional Control Commissions. These were to play an important role in the further bureaucratisation of the Party—when the early incumbents (Dzerzhinsky, Preobrazhensky and Muranov) had been replaced by Stalin's henchmen.

October

Signature of Peace Treaty with Poland.

November 2–6

Fifth All-Russian Trade Union Conference.

Trotsky points out that the parallelism between unions and administrative organs, responsible for the prevailing confusion, had to be eliminated. This could only be done by the conversion of trade (professionalny) unions into production (proizvodstvenny) unions. If the leadership of the unions objected they would have to be 'shaken up' as the leaders of the Railways unions had been. The 'winged word' (Lenin) had been uttered!

November 14

General Wrangel evacuates the Crimea. End of Civil War.

November

Moscow Provincial Party Conference.

Opposition groups within Party shown to be growing rapidly. The recently formed Workers Opposition, the Democratic-Centralists and the Ignatov group (a local Moscow faction closely allied to the Workers' Opposition and later to merge with it) had secured 124 delegates to this Conference against 154 for supporters of the Central Committee. (47)

(47) Tenth Party Congress, p. 829, note 2.

November 8–9

Meeting of *Plenum of Central Committee.*

Trotsky submits a 'preliminary draft of theses' entitled 'The trade unions and their future role', later published on December 25—in slightly altered form—as a pamphlet: 'The role and tasks of the trade unions'. 'It was necessary immediately to proceed to reorganise the trade unions, i.e. to select the leading personnel' (Thesis 5). Dizzy with success, Trotsky again threatened to 'shake up' various trade unions as he had 'shaken up those of the transport workers'. (48) What was needed was 'to replace irresponsible agitators (sic!) by production-minded trade unionists'. (49) Trotsky's theses were put to the vote and defeated by the narrow margin of 8 votes to 7. Lenin then 'bluntly dissociated himself from Trotsky and persuaded the Central Committee to do likewise'. (50) An alternative resolution proposed by Lenin was then passed by 10 votes to 4. It called for 'reform of the Tsektran', advocated 'sound forms of the militarisation of labour' (51) and proclaimed that 'the Party ought to educate and support . . . a new type of trade unionist, the energetic and imaginative economic

(48) I. Deutscher, op. cit., pp. 502-503.

(49) I. Deutscher, *Soviet Trade Unions*, p. 41.

(50) I. Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, pp. 502-503.

(51) V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works*, vol. IX, p. 30.

organiser who will approach economic issues not from the angle of distribution and consumption but from that of expanding production'. (52) The latter was clearly the dominant viewpoint. Trotsky's 'error' had been that he had carried it out to its logical conclusion. But the Party needed a sacrificial goat. The Plenum was 'to forbid Trotsky to speak in public on the relationship between the trade unions and the State'. (53)

(52) G. Zinoviev, *Sochineniya* (Moscow 1924-6), VI, 599-600.

(53) I. Deutscher, op. cit., pp. 502-503. This sanction was to be lifted by the Central Committee, at its meeting of December 24, which also decided that the whole matter ought now to be openly discussed.

December 2

Trotsky, in a speech to the enlarged Plenum of Tsektran declared that 'a competent, hierarchically organised civil service had its merits. Russia suffered not from the excess but from the lack of an efficient bureaucracy'. (54) 'The militarisation of the trade unions and the militarisation of transport required an internal, ideological militarisation'. (55) Stalin was later to describe Trotsky as 'the patriarch of the bureaucrats'. (56) When the Central Committee again rebuffed him 'Trotsky fretfully reminded Lenin and the other members of how often they had privately urged him . . . to act ruthlessly and disregard considerations of democracy. It was disloyal of them . . . to pretend in public that they defended the democratic principle against him'. (57)

(54) ibid., p. 503.

(55) L. Trotsky, *Sochineniya,* XV, pp. 422-423.

(56) J. Stalin, *Sochineniya,* VI, p. 29.

(57) I. Deutscher, op. cit., p. 503.

December 7

At a *Plenum of the Central Committee* Bukharin had produced a resolution on 'industrial democracy'. The terms were to infuriate Lenin. They were 'a verbal twist', 'a tricky phrase', 'confusing', 'a squib'. 'Industry is always necessary. Democracy is not always necessary. The term "industrial democracy" gives rise to a number of utterly false ideas'. (58) 'It might be understood to repudiate dictatorship and individual management'. (59) 'Without bonuses in kind and disciplinary courts it was just empty talk'. (60)

(58) V. I. Lenin, *Selected Works,* vol. IX, p.12.

(59) ibid., p. 53.

(60) ibid., p. 26.

The strongest opposition to Trotsky's schemes for the 'militarisation of labour' came from that section of the Party with the deepest roots in the trade unions. Some of these Party members had not only dominated the Trade Union Council up to this time but 'were also the direct beneficiaries of the doctrine of autonomous trade union responsibility'. (61) In other words they were already, in part, trade union bureaucrats. It was partly from these elements that the Workers Opposition was to develop.

(61) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 125.

By now, however, the leading politico-economic apparatus was quite different from the one we saw emerging in 1918. In just over 2 years the Party apparatus had gained undisputed political control of the State (through the bureaucratised soviets). It had also gained almost complete control of the economic apparatus (through trade union officials and appointed industrial managers). The various groups had acquired the competence and experience necessary to become a social category with a specific function: to manage Russia. Their fusion

was inevitable.

December 22–29

The *Eighth All-Russian Congress of Soviets* was held in Moscow. It provided an opportunity for a public airing of the diverging viewpoints on the trade union question which had developed within the Party and which could now no longer be contained within its ranks.

The degree of opposition which had developed to official Party policy can be gauged by the contents of Zinoviev's speech: 'We will establish more intimate contacts with the working masses. We will hold meetings in the barracks, in the camps and in the factories. The working masses will then . . . understand that it is no joke when we proclaim that a new era is about to start, that as soon as we can breathe freely again we will transfer our political meetings into the factories . . . We are asked what we mean by workers' and peasants democracy. I answer: nothing more and nothing less than what we meant by it in 1917. We must re-establish the principle of election in the workers and peasants democracy. . . If we have deprived ourselves of the most elementary democratic rights for workers and peasants, it is time we put an end to this state of affairs'. (62)

Zinoviev's concern for democracy did not carry much weight, being factionally motivated (it was part of a campaign to discredit Trotsky). At that time public orators in search of laughs could usually get them by carefully chosen quotations from Zinoviev on the subject of democratic rights. (63)

December 30

Joint meeting of the Party fraction to the Eighth Congress of Soviets, of Party members on the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, and of Party members in various other organisations, held in the Bolshoi Theatre, Moscow, to discuss the 'trade union question'. All the main protagonists were on hand to state their respective cases.

The various viewpoints, as stated at the meeting (or outlined in articles written at the time or within the next few weeks) can be summarised as follows: (64)

Trotsky and particularly Bukharin later amended their original proposals in order to constitute a bloc at the Congress.

For *Lenin* the trade unions were 'reservoirs of state power'. They were to provide a broad social basis 'for the proletarian dictatorship exercised by the Party', a base that was badly needed in view of the predominantly peasant nature of the country. The unions were to be the 'link' or 'transmission belt' between the Party and the mass of non-party workers. The unions could not be autonomous. They could not play an independent role either in the initiation or in the implementation of policy. They had to be strongly influenced by Party thinking and would undertake the political education of the masses along lines determined by the Party. In

(62) *Vosmoi vserossiiski s'yezd sovetov: stenograficheski otchet* (Eighth All-Russian Congress of Soviets: stenographic report), Moscow 1921, p. 324.

(63) L. Schapiro. *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy*, Praeger, New York, 1965) p. 271.

(64) These summaries are based on Deutscher's detailed accounts in '*Soviet Trade Unions*' (pp. 42-52). 'In the course of the pre-Congress discussion a great number of factions and groups emerged, each with its own views and "theses" on the trade unions. The differences between some of these groups were very subtle indeed, and nearly all groups referred to so many common principles that sometimes the object of the debate seemed almost unreal'. Only 3 motions were finally presented to the Congress: Lenin's (The Platform of the Ten), the Trotsky-Bukharin motion and the proposals of the Workers Opposition. Deutscher points out that 'a comparison between these motions tends up to a point to obscure rather than throw into relief the issue with which the Congress tried to come to grips because, for tactical reasons, the authors of every motion incorporated passages from their opponents' motions and thereby blurred the real differences'.

this way they would become 'schools of communism' for their 7 million members.* The Party was to be the teacher. 'The Russian Communist Party, in the person of its Central and Regional organisations, *unconditionally* guides as before the whole ideological side of the work of the trade unions'. (65)

Lenin stressed that the unions could not be instruments of the State. Trotsky's assumption that the unions need no longer defend the workers because the State was now a workers' state was wrong. 'Our state is such that the entire organised proletariat must defend itself: *we* (sic) must use these workers' organisations for the defence of the workers from their state *and for the defence of our state by the workers*'. (The words in italics are often omitted when this famous passage is quoted.)

According to Lenin, militarisation was not to be regarded as a permanent feature of socialist labour policy. Persuasion had to be used as well as coercion. While it was *normal* (sic!) for the state to appoint officials from above (a long, long way had been travelled since the statements recorded under the heading of May 20, 1917—M.B.) it would be inexpedient for the trade unions to do the same. The unions could make recommendations for administrative-economic jobs and should co-operate in planning. They should inspect, through specialised departments, the work of the economic administration.

Wage-rate fixing was to be transferred to the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions. In relation to wages the extreme egalitarianism of the Workers Opposition had to be fought. Wages policy was to be designed so as to 'discipline labour and increase its productivity'. (66) Party members had 'chattered enough about principles in the Smolny. Now, after 3 years, they had decrees on all points of the production problem'. (67) 'The decisions on the militarisation of labour, etc, were incontrovertible and there is no need whatsoever to withdraw my words of ridicule concerning references to democracy made by those who challenged these decisions . . . we shall extend democracy in the workers' organisations but not make a fetish of it . . . ' (68)

Trotsky reiterated his belief that 'the transformation of the trade unions into production unions . . . formed the greatest task of our epoch'. 'The unions ought permanently to assess their membership from the angle of production and should always possess a full and precise characterisation of the productive value of any worker'. The leading bodies of the trade unions and of the economic administration should have between one third and one half of their members in common in order to

(65) Tenth Party Congress. *O roli i zadachakh profsoyuzov* (On the role and tasks of the trade unions). Resolutions, I, 536-542 ff.

(66) I. Deutscher, *Soviet Trade Unions*, p. 51.

(67) V. I. Lenin. *Selected Works*, vol. IX, p.6.

(68) ibid., p. 76.

* *According to figures given by Zinoviev at the Tenth Party Congress union membership was* 1.5 *million in July* 1917, 2.6 *million in January* 1918, 3.5 *million in* 1919, 4.3 *million in* 1920 *and* 7 *million in* 1921.

put an end to the antagonism between them. Bourgeois technicians and administrators who had become full members of a union were to be entitled to hold managerial posts, without supervision by commissars. After a real minimum wage had been secured for all workers there should be 'shock competition' (udarnichestvo) between workers in production.

Bukharin's views had been evolving rapidly. What he now advocated was an attempt to build a bridge between the official views of the Party and those of the Workers' Opposition. There had to be 'workers' democracy in production'. The 'governmentalising of the unions' had to go hand in hand with the 'unionising of the state'. 'The logical and historical termination' (of this process) 'will not be the engulfment of the unions by the proletarian state, but the disappearance of both categories—of the unions as well as of the state—and the creation of a third: the communistically organised society'. (69) Lenin was to seize upon Bukharin's platform as 'a full break with communism and a transition to a position of syndicalism'. (70) 'It destroyed the need for the Party'. 'If the trade unions, nine-tenths of whose members are non-Party workers, appoint the managers of industry, what is the use of the Party?'. (71) 'So we have "grown up", he added ominously, 'from small differences to syndicalism, signifying a complete break with communism and an unavoidable split in the Party'. (72) Other attacks by Lenin on Bukharin's views are to be found in his famous article censuring Trotsky. (73)

The views of the *Workers' Opposition* were put to the Moscow meeting by Shlyapnikov, a metal worker (and were later to be developed more fully by Kollontai and others). Explicitly or implicitly these views postulated the domination of the trade unions over the state. 'The Workers' Opposition referred of course to 'Point 5' of the 1919 Programme and charged the leadership of the Party with violating its pledges towards the trade unions . . . the leadership of the Party and of Government bodies had in the last 2 years systematically narrowed the scope of trade union work and reduced almost to nil the influence of the working class . . . The Party and the economic authorities, having been swamped by bourgeois technicians and other non-proletarian elements displayed outward hostility to the unions. . . The remedy was the concentration of industrial management in the hands of the trade unions'. The transition should take place from below up. 'At the factory level, the Factory Committees should regain their erstwhile dominant position'. (The Bolshevik trade unionists had taken a long time to come round to this viewpoint! — M.B.) The Opposition proposed more trade union representation in various controlling bodies. 'Not a single person was to be appointed to any administrative-economic post without the agreement of the trade unions . . . Officials recommended by the trade unions were to

(69) Bukharin. Tenth Party Congress. *O zadachakh i strukture profsoyuzov* (On the tasks and structure of the trade unions). Appendix 16, p. 802.

(70) V. I. Lenin. *Selected Works*, vol. IX, p. 35.

(71) ibid., p. 36.

(72) V. I. Lenin. *Krisis partii* (The crisis in the party), *Pravda*, January 21, 1921.

(73) V. I. Lenin. 'Once again on the trade unions, the present situation and the mistakes of comrades Trotsky and Bukharin'. *Selected Works*, vol. IX, pp. 40-80.

remain accountable for their conduct to the unions, who should also have the right to recall them from their posts at any time. The programme culminated in the demand that an 'All-Russian Producers' Congress' be convened to elect the central management of the entire national economy. National Congresses of separate unions were similarly to elect managements for the various branches of the economy. Local and regional managements should be formed by local trade union conferences, while the management of single factories was to belong to the Factory Committees, which were to remain part of the trade union organisation. . . 'In this way' Shlyapnikov asserted, 'there is created the unity of will which is essential in the organisation of the ecomomy, and also a real possibility for the influence of the initiative of the broad working masses on the organisation and development of our economy'. (74) Last but not least the Workers' Opposition proposed a radical revision of the wages policy in an extremely egalitarian spirit: money wages were to be progressively replaced by rewards in kind. Within the Party, it was clearly on the shoulders of the Workers' Opposition that, at this late stage, fell the task of endeavouring to maintain the revolutionary ideals of *State and Revolution,* with respect to the autonomous and democratic involvement of the masses in the functions of economic decision-taking.

(74) Shlyapnikov. Tenth Party Congress. *Organizatsiya narodnogo khozyaistva i zadachi soyuzov'* (The organisation of the economy and the tasks of the unions). Speech of December 30, 1920. Appendix 2, pp. 789-793.

1921

January
'Official' campaign, preparatory to Tenth Congress, launched by the strongly Leninist Petrograd Party Committee (in Zinoviev's hands). Even before the Congress, many administrative measures were taken to ensure the defeat of the Opposition. So irregular were some of these that the Moscow Party Committee at one stage voted a resolution *publicly* censuring the Petrograd organisation 'for not observing the rules of proper controversy'. (1)

January 13
Moscow Party Committee denounced 'tendency of the Petrograd organisation to make itself a special centre for the preparation of Party Congresses'. (2) The Leninists were using the Petrograd organisation as a base from which to apply pressure to the rest of the Party. Moscow Committee urged Central Committee 'to ensure the equitable distribution of materials and speakers . . . so that all points of view should be represented'. (3) This recommendation was to be flagrantly violated. At the Congress, Kollontai stated that the circulation of her pamphlet had been deliberately impeded. (4)

January 14
Publication of the *'Platform of the* 10' (Artem, Kalinin, Kamenev, Lenin, Lozovsky, Petrovsky. Rudzutak, Stalin, Tomsky and Zinoviev). This document gave a more finished form to Lenin's theses for the Congress.

January 16
Pravda publishes the Bukharin platform, described by Lenin as the 'acme of ideological disintegration'. (5)

January 21
In an article in *Pravda* on the Party crisis, Lenin writes: 'Now we add to our platform the following: we must combat the ideological confusion of those unsound elements of the opposition who go to the lengths of repudiating all "militarisation of economy", of repudiating not only the "method of appointing" which has been the prevailing method up to now, but *all* appointments. In the last analysis this means repudiating the

(1) L. Trotsky. Tenth Party Congress *Otvet petrogradskim tovarishcham* (Answer to the Petrograd comrades). pp. 826-827, note 1.

(2) ibid., p. 779, Appendix 6.

(3) ibid.

(4) A. Kollontai. Tenth Party Congress, p. 103.

(5) V. I. Lenin. *Selected Works*, vol. IX, p. 35.

leading role of the Party in relation to the non-Party masses. We must combat the syndicalist deviation which will kill the Party if it is not completely cured of it'. A little later Lenin was to write that 'the syndicalist deviation leads to the fall of the dictatorship of the proletariat'. (6) In other words working class power ('the dictatorship of the proletariat') is impossible if there are militants in the Party who think the working class should exert more power in production ('the syndicalist deviation').*

(6) ibid., p. 57.

January 24

Meeting of the Communist Fraction during *Second Congress of the Miners' Union.* Kiselev, a miner, put the case for the Workers' Opposition which got 62 votes —as against 137 for the Leninist platform and 8 for Trotsky's. (7)

(7) ibid, p. 79.

January 25

Pravda publishes the Workers' Opposition's 'Theses on the Trade Unions'. Alexandra Kollontai publishes *'The Workers' Opposition'* which develops the same ideas at a more theoretical level. (8)

(8) The full text is available as *Solidarity Pamphlet* No 7. (price 3/6, post free).

For all the political storm unleashed by the Workers' Opposition there is little reliable documentation about this tendency. What information there is comes mainly from Leninist sources. (9) The virulence of the attacks against the Workers' Opposition suggests it enjoyed considerable support among rank and file of factory workers and that this caused the Party leadership serious alarm. Shlyapnikov, (the first Commissar of Labour), Lutovinov and Medvedev, the leaders of the metalworkers were its most prominent spokesmen.

(9) See for instance K. Shelavin's *Rabochaya oppozitsiya* (The Workers Opposition), Moscow 1930.

'Geographically it seems to have been concentrated in the South Eastern parts of European Russia: the Donets Basin, the Don and Kuban regions and the Samara province on the Volga. In Samara the Workers' Opposition was actually in control of the Party organisation in 1921. Before the Party shake-up in the Ukraine, in late 1920, the oppositionists had won a sympathetic majority in the republic as a whole. Other points of strength were in the Moscow province, where the Workers' Opposition polled about a quarter of the Party votes and in the Metalworkers union throughout the country'. (10) When Tomsky was to abandon the trade unionists and rejoin Lenin's camp later in 1921, he was to 'explain' the appeal of the Workers' Opposition in terms of the metalworkers' ideology of industrialism and syndicalism. (11) It should be remem-

(10) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 127.

(11) Tomsky. Tenth Party Congress pp. 371-372.

---

* *Lenin here poses quite clearly the question 'power of the Party' or 'power of the class'. He unambiguously opts for the former—no doubt rationalising his choice by equating the two. But he goes even further. He not only equates 'workers power' with the rule of the Party. He equates it with acceptance of the ideas of the Party leaders*!

bered that these same metalworkers had formed the backbone of the Factory Committees in 1917.

February

During the pre-Congress discussion the leninist faction made full use of the newly established Control Commission. They ensured the resignation of both Preobrazhensky and Dzerzhinsky (judged unduly 'soft' in relation to the Workers Opposition and to the Trotskyists respectively) and their replacement by hardened apparatchiks such as Solts who proceeded to berate the divided Party leadership for its weakness in curtailing the 'ultra-left'. The Leninists whipped up a noisy campaign and played relentlessly on the themes of unity and of the internal dangers confronting the Revolution. Again and again they took refuge in the cult of Lenin's personality. All other tendencies were labelled 'objectively counter-revolutionary'. They succeeded in getting control of the Party machine, even in areas with a long tradition of support for the Opposition.

So 'successful' were some of these 'victories' that there is serious doubt as to whether they were not achieved by fraud. On January 19 for instance a Party Conference of the Baltic Fleet is said to have given a 90% vote to the Leninists. (12) Yet within two or three weeks a strong Fleet Opposition was to develop and widely distribute leaflets proclaiming: 'The Political Department of the Baltic Fleet has lost all contact not only with the masses but with the active political workers too. It has become a bureaucratic organ without authority. . . It has annihilated all local initiative and reduced all political work to the level of secretarial correspondence'. (13) Outside the Party, even harsher things were being said.

(12) *Pravda*, January 27, 1921.

March 2–17

The Kronstadt Rebellion.

This key event which had a profound effect on the Congress which opened a few days later has been analysed in detail elsewhere. (14)

(13) Quoted in A. S. Pukhov *Kronshtadtski myatezh v* 1921 g. (The Kronstadt Revolt of 1921), Leningrad 1931, p. 52. Ida Mett's pamphlet on *The Kronstadt Commune* gives a good idea of the 'disaffection' rampant in Petrograd at the time.

(14) For useful documentation, see *Solidarity* Pamphlet No. 27 *The Kronstadt Commune*, by Ida Mett (3/- post free) and *Kronstadt* 1921 by Victor Serge (9d. post free).

March 8–16

Tenth Party Congress

This was to prove one of the most dramatic assemblies in the whole history of Bolshevism. But in a sense the arguments used and the battles fought out there were only a distorted reflection of the much deeper crisis in the country as a whole. Strikes had broken out in the Petrograd area towards the end of February and Kronstadt was up in arms. Both were but the visible portions of a much larger iceberg of submerged discontent and disaffection.

From beginning to end the apparatus was in full control of the Congress. An atmosphere of near hysteria, such as had not been seen before at Bolshevik gatherings pervaded the proceedings. It was now essential for the Party leadership to suppress the Opposition which whether it knew it or not—and whether it wanted to do so

or not—was making itself the mouthpiece of all these frustrated aspirations. It was above all necessary to expunge the image of Kronstadt as a movement which defended the principles of the October Revolution against the communists—the idea of the 'third revolution'—which was exactly what the Kronstadters were proclaiming. 'We fight' the rebels proclaimed 'for the genuine power of the working people while the bloody Trotsky and the glutted Zinoviev and their band of adherents fight for the power of the Party. . . ' (15) 'Kronstadt has raised for the first time the banner of the uprising of the Third Revolution of the toilers. . . The autocracy has fallen. The Constituent Assembly has been despatched to the region of the damned. Now the commissariocracy is crumbling. . . ' (16)

(15) *Isvestiya vremennogo revolyutsionnogo komiteta* (News of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee), March 10, 1921.

(16) ibid., March 12, 1921.

At the Congress Trotsky rounded on the Workers' Opposition. 'They have come out with dangerous slogans. They have made a fetish of democratic principles. They have placed the workers' right to elect representatives above the Party. As if the Party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers' democracy!' Trotsky spoke of the 'revolutionary historical birthright of the Party'. 'The Party is obliged to maintain its dictatorship . . . regardless of temporary vacillations even in the working class. . . The dictatorship does not base itself at every given moment on the formal principle of a workers' democracy. . . '

The physical attack on Kronstadt—in which over 200 delegates to the Congress participated—was accompanied by a massive verbal onslaught against the Workers' Opposition and similar tendencies. Although leading members of the Opposition were to fight against the Kronstadters (because they still retained illusions about 'the historical role of the Party' and because they were still trapped in old organisational loyalties), Lenin and the Party leaders were fully aware of the deep affinities between the two movements. 'Both attacked his leadership for having violated the spirit of the revolution, for having sacrificed democratic and egalitarian ideals on the altar of expediency and for inclining to bureaucratic concern with power for its own sake'. (17) In relation to real issues their demands also overlapped in a number of areas. The Kronstadters—among whom were many dissident Party members—had proclaimed that 'the Soviet Socialist Republic can only be strong when its administration belongs to the toiling classes, represented by renovated trade unions. . . Thanks to the policy of the ruling party the trade unions have had absolutely no opportunity to be purely class organisations'. (18) Down to the fetishism of the unions, the language was the same.

(17) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 145-6.

(18) News of the Provisional Revolutionary Committee, March 9.

The Congress opened with a virulent speech by Lenin appealing for loyalty to the Party and denouncing the

Workers' Opposition as a threat to the Revolution. The Opposition was a 'petty-bourgeois', 'syndicalist', 'anarchist' strand 'caused in part by the entry into the ranks of the Party of elements which had still not completely adopted the communist world view'. (19) (In fact the Opposition was the very opposite. It was the reaction of the proletarian base of the Party to the entry of hordes of such elements.) The basic arguments of the Opposition were not dealt with in any depth. What argument—as distinct from invective—there was, was often confused. For instance, apart from being (a) 'genuinely counter-revolutionary', and (b) 'objectively counter-revolutionary' the Workers' Opposition was also 'too revolutionary'. Their demands were 'too advanced' and the Soviet Government still had to concentrate on overcoming the masses' cultural backwardness. (20) According to Smilga the extreme demands (of the Workers' Opposition) disrupted the Party's efforts and raised hopes among the workers which could only be disappointed. (21) But, most important, the demands of the Workers' Opposition were revolutionary in a wrong (anarcho-syndicalist) way. This was the ultimate anathema. 'If we perish' Lenin said privately, 'it is all the more important to preserve our ideological line and give a lesson to our continuators. This should never be forgotten, even in hopeless circumstances'. (22)

(19) Tenth Party Congress. *O sindikalistskom i anarkhistskom uklone v nashei partii* (On the syndicalist and anarchist deviation in our party). Resolutions I, 530.

(20) ibid., pp. 382-383.

(21) ibid., p. 258.

(22) Trotsky. Letter to Friends in the USSR, 1930. (Trotsky Archive T 3279).

Gone were the brief days of the 1917 honeymoon. Gone was the rhetoric of *State and Revolution.* Out came the skeletons of the split in the First International. The cardinal crime of the Opposition was that elements among it (and more particularly among its fringes, such as Myasnikov and Bogdanov) were beginning to raise really awkward questions. In a clumsy and still fumbling manner some were beginning to question the primacy of the Party—others the class nature of the Russian State. As long as criticisms dealt with the 'bureaucratic deformations or distortions' of this or that institution—or even in the Party itself—the Party could cope (it had in fact become quite practiced in the matter!). But to raise doubts about these other absolutely basic matters could not be tolerated.

The threat was serious, even if at the moment only implicit in the Opposition's thinking. Ignatov's theses had warned of the likely effects of 'the mass entry into the ranks of our Party of people from bourgeois and petty-bourgeois strata' combined with 'the heavy losses sustained by the proletariat during the Civil War'. (23) But one thing led to another. Shortly after the Congress Bogdanov and the *'Workers' Truth'* Group were to claim that the revolution had ended in a 'complete defeat for the working class'. They were to charge that 'the bureaucracy, along with the NEPmen had become a new bourgeoisie, depending on the exploitation of the workers and taking advantage of their disorganisation. . . With the trade unions in the hands of the

(23) Tenth Party Congress (Ignator Theses).

bureaucracy the workers were more helpless than ever'. 'The Communist Party . . . after becoming the ruling Party, the party of the organisers and leaders of the State apparatus and of the capitalist-based economic life . . . had irrevocably lost its tie and community with the proletariat'. (24) This kind of thinking threatened the very basis of the Bolshevik regime and had ruthlessly to be expunged from the minds of working people.

'Marxism teaches us' Lenin said 'that only the political party of the working class, i.e. the Communist Party, is in a position to unite, educate, organise . . . and direct all sides of the proletarian movement and hence all the working masses. Without this the dictatorship of the proletariat is meaningless'. (25) 'Marxism' of course taught other things too. It emphasised that 'the emancipation of the working class was the task of the working class itself' (26) and that 'the communists do not form a separate Party, opposed to other working class parties'. (27) What Lenin was now preaching was not in fact 'Marxism' but the crude Leninism of *'What is to be done*?' (written in 1902), the Leninism which had asserted that the working class left to its own devices could only develop a trade union consciousness and would have to have political consciousness injected into it from the outside, by those 'vehicles of science': the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia.* In the minds of the Bolsheviks the Party embodied the historical interests of the class whether the class understood it or not—and whether the class wanted it or not. Given these premisses, *any* challenge to the hegemony of the Party—whether in action or only in thought—was tantamount to 'treason' to the Revolution, to a rape of History.

'Unity' was the all-pervasive theme of the Congress. Given the threat from without and the 'threat' from within it didn't prove very hard for the leadership to get draconian measures accepted. These were still further to restrict the rights of Party members. Factional rights were abolished. 'The Congress prescribes the rapid dispersal of *all* groups without exception which have formed themselves on one platform or another . . . failure to execute this decision of the Congress will lead to immediate and unconditional expulsion from the Party'. (28) A secret provision gave the Central Committee unlimited disciplinary rights, including expulsion from the Party and even from the Central Committee itself (for which a majority of two-thirds would be required.)

These measures, an organisational turning point in the history of Bolshevism, were overwhelmingly endorsed.

(24) N. Karev. *O gruppe "Rabochaya Pravda"* (On the 'Workers Truth' Group). *Bolshevik*, July 15, 1924, pp. 31 ff.

(25) Tenth Party Congress. Resolutions I, 531.

(26) K. Marx and F. Engels. Manifesto of the Communist Party. *Selected Works*, Moscow (FLPH), 1958, vol. 1, p. 28.

(27) ibid., p. 46.

(28) Tenth Party Congress. 'On the unity of the Party'. Resolutions I, 527-530.

---

* *But even they were material of dubious value. The first Russian edition of 'What is to be done' had carried on its frontispiece Lasalle's famous aphorism: 'the Party strengthens itself by purging itself'.*

But not without certain misgivings. Karl Radek stated: 'I had a feeling that a rule was being established which left us uncertain as to whom it might be applied against. When the Central Committee was chosen, the comrades from the majority composed a list which gave them control. Every comrade knew that this was done at the beginning of the dissension in the Party. We do not know . . . what complications may arise. The comrades who propose this rule think it is a sword aimed against differently thinking comrades. Although I am voting for this resolution I feel that it may even be turned against us'. Stressing the dangerous situation confronting both Party and State, Radek concluded 'let the Central Committee at the moment of danger take the sternest measures against the best comrades, if it finds this necessary'. (29) This attitude, or rather this mentality [the Party can't be wrong in relation to the class. The Central Committee can't be wrong in relation to the Party] was to explain many subsequent events. It was literally to prove a noose around the necks of thousands of honest revolutionaries. It helps one understand both Trotsky's public denials of 1927 that Lenin had ever left a political testament, and the 'confessions' of the Bolshevik Old Guard during the Moscow Trials of 1936—1938. The Party, as an institution, had become reified. It now epitomised man's alienation in relation to revolutionary politics.

(29) Radek. ibid., p. 540.

In relation to these political shifts—or rather to this emergence of what had always been some of the underlying strands of Bolshevism—the actual 'discussions' of the Conference were of less significance. They have therefore deliberately been left to the end. Still operating within the ideological framework of 'the Party' Perepechko, a member of the Workers' Opposition, identified bureaucratism (in the Party) as the source of the cleavage between the authority of the Soviets and the soviet apparatus as a whole and the broad working masses. (30) Medvedev charged the Central Committee with 'deviations in the direction of distrust of the creative powers of the working class and concessions to the petty-bourgeoisie and to the bourgeois official castes'. (31) To offset this tendency and preserve the proletarian spirit in the Party, the Workers' Opposition proposed that every Party member be required to live and work for 3 months out of every year as an ordinary proletarian or peasant, engaged in physical labour'. (32) Ignatov's theses called for a minimum of two thirds of each body to be composed of workers. Criticism of the leadership was more bitter than it had been for years. A delegate raised a storm by calling Lenin 'the greatest chinovnik' (hierarch of the tsarist bureaucracy). (33)

(30) ibid., p. 93.

(31) ibid., p. 140.

(32) ibid., 'Resolution on Party organisation proposed by the Workers Opposition.' p. 663.

(33) Yaroslavsky, ibid., reporting statements by Y. K. Milonov.

The leadership played its usual game. A long resolution on the trade unions, drawn up by Zinoviev was passed by 336 to 50 (for Trotsky's position) and 18 (for the Workers' Opposition). (34) 'Zinoviev took pains in

(34) ibid., p. 828, n.l.

this document to claim absolute continuity with the trade union doctrine . . . stated by the First Trade Union Congress and in the Party programme of 1919. This was the familiar device of generating a smokescreen of orthodoxy to cover a change of course'. (35) The document which spoke a lot about 'workers' democracy' went on to stress in unequivocal terms that the Party would guide all trade union work.

(35) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 156.

On the penultimate day of the Congress, at the end of a session, without any previous discussion in the Party and after a number of delegates had already left, Lenin made his famous proposals concerning the New Economic Policy. He proposed the substitution of a 'tax in kind' for the forced requisitioning of grain from the peasants, one of the most hated features of 'war communism'. There would be an end to Government control of the grain supply and, by implication, a free trade in grain. This momentous proposal was followed by four ten-minutes contributions from the floor. The official report of the Tenth Congress runs to 330 pages, of which a bare 20 are devoted to the NEP! (36) The main preoccupations of the Congress had clearly been elsewhere!

(36) L. Schapiro. op. cit., p. 308.

Internal tightening up now proceeded with a vengeance. A resolution was voted to the effect that 'the most immediate task of the Central Committee was the stringent effectuation of uniformity in the structure of Party committees'. The membership of the Central Commitee was raised from 19 to 25—of whom 5 were to devote themselves exclusively to Party work (especially visiting provincial committees and attending provincial Party Conferences). (37) The new Central Committee immediately imposed a radical change in the composition of the Secretariat. The Trotskyists (Krestinsky, Preobrazhensky and Serebriakov), judged lukewarm in their support of the leninist line, were dropped from the Central Committee altogether. Radical changes were also brought about in the Orgbureau and in the composition of a number of regional Party organisations. (38) 'Disciplined', 'safe' mediocrities were being installed at all levels. 'The organisational shifts of 1921 were a decisive victory for Lenin, the Leninists and the Leninist philosophy of Party life'. (39) The Party having willed the end was now willing the means.

(37) Tenth Party Congress. Resolutions, pp. 522-526.

(38) R. V. Daniels, op. cit., p. 151-152.

(39) ibid., p. 152.

Epilogue
May 1921
All-Russian Congress of Metalworkers' Union.
This union had proved the backbone of the 1905 events. It had been won over by the Bolsheviks as early as 1913. It had animated the Factory Committees and provided many detachments of Red Guards. It was now deeply influenced by the idea of the Workers' Opposition. Its leader, Medvedev, was an active member of the Opposition. His grip on the union had to be broken.

At the Metalworkers' Congress the Central Committee of the Party handed down to the Party fraction in the union a list of recommended candidates for *union* (sic!) leadership. The metalworkers' delegates voted down this list, as did the Party fraction in the union (by 120 votes to 40). Every conceivable pressure was then brought to bear against them. The Opposition had to be smashed. The Central Committee of the Party disregarded every one of the votes and appointed a Metalworkers' Committee of its own. (40) So much for 'elected and revocable delegates'. Elected by the union rank and file and revocable by the Party leadership!

(40) Isvestiya Ts. K. No. 32, 1921, pp. 3-4. See also Schapiro, op. cit., pp. 323-324.

May 17–25

Fourth All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions.

This was to discuss the role of trade unions in the new, privately owned, sector sanctioned by the NEP. Tomsky, as president of the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions, was entrusted by the Central Committee of the Party with the preparation of the appropriate 'theses' and with getting them accepted first by the Party fraction and later by the Congress as a whole. All went smoothly until by 1,500 votes to 30 the Congress also accepted an inoffensive-looking motion proposed by Riazanov on behalf of the Party fraction, which was to precipitate a major scandal. The key section of the resolution stated: 'the leading personnel of the trade union movement must be chosen under the general guidance of the Party, but the Party must make a special effort to allow normal methods of proletarian democracy, particularly in the trade unions, where the choice of leaders should be left to the trade unionists themselves'. (41)

(41) Ryazanov. Eleventh Party Congress. pp. 277-8. Also Schapiro, op. cit., pp. 324-325.

The Central Committee was furious. It came down on the Congress like a ton of bricks. Tomsky, who had not even supported the maverick resolution, had his credentials as representative of the Central Committee to the Congress immediately withdrawn. He was replaced in this position by such noted trade unionists as Lenin, Stalin and Bukharin—whose task it was to curb the fractious fraction. Ryazanov was barred from ever engaging in trade union work again.

A special commission, headed by Stalin, was set up to 'investigate Tomsky's behaviour'. Its investigation completed, it decided to reprimand him severely for his 'criminal negligence' (in allowing the Congress to express its own wishes). Tomsky was relieved of all his functions on the All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions. As for the Party fraction, it was 'talked into' reversing its decision of the day before. There is no record of how the hundreds of others fared who had supported the resolution. But who cared? In 1917 it had been proclaimed that 'every cook should learn to govern the State'. By 1921 the State was clearly powerful enough to govern every cook!

Conclusion

The events described in this pamphlet show that in relation to industrial policy there is a clear-cut and incontrovertible link between what happened under Lenin and Trotsky and the later practices of Stalinism. We know that many on the revolutionary left will find this statement hard to swallow. We are convinced however that any honest reading of the facts cannot but lead to this conclusion. The more one unearths about this period, the more difficult it becomes to define—or even to see—the 'gulf' allegedly separating what happened in Lenin's time from what happened later. Real knowledge of the facts also makes it impossible to accept—as Deutscher does—that the whole course of events was 'historically inevitable' and 'objectively determined'. 'Bolshevik ideology and practice were *themselves* important and sometimes decisive factors in the equation, at every critical stage of this critical period. Now that more facts are available self-mystification on these issues should no longer be possible. Should any who have read these pages remain 'confused' it will be because they want to remain in that state—or because (as the future beneficiaries of a society similar to the Russian one) it is their interest to remain so.

The fact that so many who have spent a lifetime in the socialist movement know so little about this period is not really surprising. In the first flush of enthusiasm for the 'victorious socialist revolution' of 1917 it was almost inevitable that the viewpoint of the victors should alone have achieved a hearing. For many years the only alternative appeared to be the hypocritical laments of social-democracy or the snarls of open counter-revolution. The voice of the revolutionary-libertarian opposition to Bolshevism had been well and truly smothered.

'Vae victis' said Brennus the Gaul in 390BC as he threw his heavy sword onto the scales that were weighing the ransom, to lift the siege of Rome. 'Woe to the vanquished' has indeed been the immediate judgment of history throughout the ages. This is why so little was heard about those revolutionaries who didn't wait till 1923 but who as early as 1918 saw the direction in which Russian society was moving and proclaimed their opposition, often at the cost of their lives. They, and their very memory, were to be obliterated in the great bureaucratic upsurge of the ensuing decades, euphemistically described as the 'building of socialism'.

It is only in recent years, when the fruits of the 'victorious' revolution began to be reaped (in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere) that widespread doubts have emerged and real questions at last been asked. It is only now that serious work is being devoted to the real nature of the rot (the Bolshevik attitude to the relations

of production) and attention redirected to the prophetic warnings of the 'vanquished'. An enormous amount of valuable material relating to those formative years still remains to be restored to the revolutionary movement, to whom it rightly belongs.

Fifty years after the Russian Revolution we can see in sharper focus some of the problems that were being so heatedly discussed between 1917 and 1921. The libertarian revolutionaries of 1917 went as far as they could. But today we can speak from real experience. Hungary 1956 and France 1968 have highlighted the problems of modern bureaucratic capitalist societies and shown the nature of the revolutionary oppositions they engender, in both Eastern and Western contexts. The irrelevant and the contingent have been swept aside. The key questions of our epoch are now increasingly seen as man's domination over his environment and over the institutions he creates to solve the tasks that face him. Will man remain in control of his creations or will they dominate him? In these questions are embedded the even more fundamental ones of man's own 'false-consciousness', of his demystification in relation to the 'complexities' of management, of restoring to him his own self-confidence, of his ability to ensure control over delegated authority, and of his re-appropriation of *everything* that capitalism has taken from him. Also implicit in this question is how to release the tremendous creative potential within every one of us and harness it to ends which we ourselves have chosen.

In the struggle for these objectives Bolshevism will eventually be seen to have been a monstrous aberration, the last garb donned by a bourgeois ideology as it was being subverted at the roots. Bolshevism's emphasis on the incapacity of the masses to achieve a socialist consciousness through their own experience of life under capitalism, its prescription of a hierarchically structured 'vanguard party' and of 'centralisation to fight the centralised state power of the bourgeoisie', its proclamation of the 'historical birthright' of those who have accepted a particular vision of society (and of its future) and the decreed right to dictate this vision to others—if necessary at the point of a gun—all these will be recognised for what they are: the last attempt of bourgeois society to reassert its ordained division into leaders and led, and to maintain authoritarian social relations in all aspects of human life.

To be meaningful the revolution to come will have to be profoundly libertarian. It will be based on a real assimilation of the whole Russian experience. It will refuse to exchange one set of rulers for another, one bunch of exploiters for another, one lot of priests for another, one authoritarianism for another, or one con-

stricting orthodoxy for another. It will have to root out all such false solutions which are but so many residual manifestations of man's continued alienation. A real understanding of Bolshevism will have to be an essential ingredient in any revolution which aims at transcending *all* forms of alienation and of self-mystification. As the old society crumbles both the bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy will have to be buried under its ruins. The real roots from which they grew will have to be understood. In this gigantic task the revolution to come will find its strength and its inspiration in the real experience of millions, both East and West. If it is even marginally assisted by this little book our efforts will have been well worthwhile.

as we see it

1 Throughout the world, the vast majority of people have no control whatsoever over the decisions that most deeply and directly affect their lives. They sell their labour power while others who own or control the means of production accumulate wealth, make the laws and use the whole machinery of the State to perpetuate and reinforce their privileged positions

2 During the past century the living standards of working people have improved. But neither these improved living standards, nor the nationalisation of the means of production, nor the coming to power of parties claiming to represent the working class have basically altered the status of the worker as worker. Nor have they given the bulk of mankind much freedom outside of production. East and West, capitalism remains an inhuman type of society where the vast majority are bossed at work, and manipulated in consumption and leisure. Propaganda and policemen, prisons and schools, traditional values and traditional morality all serve to reinforce the power of the few and to convince or coerce the many into acceptance of a brutal, degrading and irrational system. The 'Communist' world is not communist and the 'Free' world is not free

3 The trade unions and the traditional parties of the left started in business to change all this. But they have come to terms with the existing patterns of exploitation. In fact they are now essential if exploiting society is to continue working smoothly. The unions act as middlemen in the labour market. The political parties use the struggles and aspirations of the working class for their own ends. The degeneration of working class organisations, itself the result of the failure of the revolutionary movement, has been a major factor in creating working class apathy, which in turn has led to the further degeneration of both parties and unions

4 The trade unions and political parties cannot be reformed, 'captured', or converted into instruments of working class emancipation. We don't call however for the proclamation of new unions, which in the conditions of today would suffer a similar fate to the old ones. Nor do we call for militants to tear up their union cards. Our aims are simply that the workers themselves should decide on the objectives of their struggles and that the control and organisation of these struggles should remain firmly in their own hands. The *forms* which this self-activity of the working class may take will vary considerably from country to country and from industry to industry. Its basic *content* will not

5 Socialism is not just the common ownership and control of the means of production and distribution. It means equality, real freedom, reciprocal recognition and a radical transformation in all human relations. It is 'man's positive self-consciousness'. It is man's understanding of his environment and of himself, his domination over his work and over such social institutions as he may need to create. These are not secondary aspects, which will automatically follow the expropriation of the old ruling class. On the contrary they are essential parts of the whole process of social transformation, for without them no genuine social transformation will have taken place

6 A socialist society can therefore only be built from below. Decisions concerning production and work will be taken by workers' councils composed of elected and revocable delegates. Decisions in other areas will be taken on the basis of the widest possible discussion and consultation among the people as a whole. The democratisation of society down to its very roots is what we mean by 'workers' power'

7 *Meaningful action,* for revolutionaries, is whatever increases the confidence, the autonomy, the initiative, the participation, the solidarity, the equalitarian tendencies and the self-activity of the masses and whatever assists their demystification. *Sterile and harmful action* is whatever reinforces the passivity of the masses, their apathy, their cynicism, their differentiation through hierarchy, their alienation, their reliance on others to do things for them and the degree to which they can therefore be manipulated by others—even by those allegedly acting on their behalf

8 No ruling class in history has ever relinquished its power without a struggle and our present rulers are unlikely to be an exception. Power will only be taken from them through the conscious, autonomous action of the vast majority of the people themselves. The building of socialism will require mass understanding and mass participation. By their rigid hierarchical structure, by their ideas and by their activities, both social-democratic and bolshevik types of organisations discourage this kind of understanding and prevent this kind of participation. The idea that socialism can somehow be achieved by an elite party (however 'revolutionary') acting 'on behalf of' the working class is both absurd and reactionary

9 We do not accept the view that by itself the working class can only achieve a trade union consciousness. On the contrary we believe that its conditions of life and its experiences in production constantly drive the working class to adopt priorities and values and to find methods of organisation which challenge the established social order and established pattern of thought. These responses are implicitly socialist. On the other hand, the working class is fragmented, dispossessed of the means of communication, and its various sections are at different levels of awareness and consciousness. The task of the revolutionary organisation is to help give proletarian consciousness an explicitly socialist content, to give practical assistance to workers in struggle and to help those in different areas to exchange experiences and link up with one another

10 We do not see ourselves as yet another leadership, but merely as an instrument of working class action. The function of **Solidarity** is to help all those who are in conflict with the present authoritarian social structure, both in industry and in society at large, to generalise their experience, to make a total critique of their condition and of its causes, and to develop the mass revolutionary consciousness necessary if society is to be totally transformed

details from **Solidarity** [North London]

c/o H. Russell, 53A, Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent

some Solidarity (North London) pamphlets

by the same author

Paris : May 1968	1/6
The Irrational in Politics	2/-

by P Cardan

Modern Capitalism and Revolution	4/3
From Bolshevism to the Bureaucracy	1/-
The Meaning of Socialism	1/-
The Crisis of Modern Society	1/-

other pamphlets

The Kronstadt Commune by Ida Mett	3/-
Kronstadt, 1921 by Victor Serge	1/-
The Workers Opposition by Alexandra Kollontai	3/6
Hungary '56 by Andy Anderson	4/3
Socialism or Barbarism	1/-
The Flint Sit-Down Strike 1936-37 by W. Linder	1/6
GMWU : Scab Union by M. Fore	1/-

available from **Solidarity** [North London]
c/o H. Russell, 53A, Westmoreland Road, Bromley, Kent

Prices include postage

A £1 subscription will bring you the next 12 issues of our monthly paper and new pamphlets, as they are produced

210

25p